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FIFTY YEARS
OF ECUMENICAL
SOCIAL THOUGHT

World Council of Churches

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Editorial

At the end of his monumental study of *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (published in German in 1911 and in English in 1931) Ernst Troeltsch wrote:

> ...Our inquiry leads to the conclusion that all Christian social work is in a problematic condition. It is problematic in general because the power of thought to overcome brutal reality is always an obscure and difficult question; it is problematic in particular because the main historic forms of the Christian doctrine of society and of social development are today, for various reasons, impotent in face of the tasks by which they are confronted (p. 1012).

This observation is not inappropriate as an introduction to this issue of *The Ecumenical Review*, which was planned in the context of ecumenical celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the historic world conference on church, community and state which met in Oxford in 1937. The question was posed: "Where are we today after 50 years of ecumenical work on social issues?"

Judging by much of the discussions we also face a somewhat problematic situation. The contemporary social scene presents challenges unforeseen even a few years ago, resulting in a widespread demand for new, more credible or more effective responses which would be able to rally the witness of the whole people of God.

The essays presented here seek to address the two sides of the present uncertainty. Firstly, concerning the history: what might we learn from the history of these fifty years of Christian endeavour to help us relate the faith to contemporary social and political life? In retrospect how appropriate has been the ecumenical response and why did it evolve the way it did? And secondly, what is our situation today and on what questions and issues are new thinking and action now needed from the ecumenical community?

The historical dimension is addressed by two veterans of ecumenical work on social questions: John C. Bennett, one of the leaders of the Oxford conference and a pioneer

of ecumenical work in this area, and Paul Abrecht, who directed the World Council of Churches' programme on Church and Society from 1949 to 1983. While both emphasize the lasting impact of Oxford, they also recognize that ecumenical social thought has continued to evolve — or is it going in a circle? — defining, in a new context, the theological basis of Christian social ethics, and arriving at conclusions which sometimes seemed to affirm and at other times to contradict those of Oxford. Today there is also disagreement about the theological basis and it was this that led the 1983 WCC Assembly in Vancouver to ask the World Council of Churches to undertake an enquiry into the possibility of setting forth a new "vital and coherent" theological understanding of its work, especially in the area of church and society.

To help evaluate contemporary trends in Christian social ethics and the new social conditions to which it must respond, we invited a number of Christian leaders and thinkers from churches in East and West, North and South. Some of them have long been active in ecumenical work in this area; others are relative newcomers. Gottfried Brackemeier, the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brazil, addresses some theological questions to liberation theology. Roger Shinn, one of the leading Christian ethicists in the USA, describes recent developments in Christian social ethics there. Heino Falcke, Probst of Erfurt, and a member of the Church and Society Working Committee, analyzes the "new thinking" to which the evangelical churches in the GDR must respond. Archbishop Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church also deals with the "new thinking", and tries to relate it to the renewal of humankind and the unity of the church. Kofi Opoku, the director of the Institute for African Studies in the University of Ghana, describes the present cultural and political context in which the churches of Africa make their witness and the new understanding this requires. Wendy Flannery, a Catholic nun who serves as secretary of the Roman Catholic Episcopal Council's Commission on Justice, Peace and Development in Fiji, and Suliana Siwatibau, a scientist and a leading Protestant laywoman in Fiji, present some of the new issues facing their churches as formulated by an ecumenical group they convened at our request.

George Lemopoulos, an Orthodox theologian now on the WCC staff, points to the impact of ecumenical social thought on Orthodox thought and reflects on the document entitled "The Contribution of the Orthodox Church to the Realization of Peace, Justice, Freedom, Fraternity and Love among People and to the Suppression of Racial and Other Discriminations" which was produced by the third Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference held in 1986. Reinhild Traitler, formerly of the WCC staff and now director of the Evangelical Academy of Boldern (Zurich), presents the challenge of feminism to the ecumenical movement, and Charles Birch, a scientist from Australia, long active in ecumenical work on Church and Society, points to the challenge of the post-modern world and asks whether the churches have the insight and courage to face up to it. Ronald Preston, a renowned Anglican ethicist, a veteran of the Oxford discussion and a participant in ecumenical social thought ever since, reflects on developments in Roman Catholic moral theology and the problems and possibilities these pose for continued ecumenical collaboration with the Roman Catholic Church. We include in the Chronicle some excerpts from a statement which reports on a recent meeting of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, which bear upon the theme of this issue. Also included is a paper by James Gustafson, who teaches Christian social ethics at the University of Chicago, which he presented to the

Working Committee of Church and Society, in September 1987, evaluating the theological substance and methodology of Church and Society's work.

We believe that this is a start in what must be an ongoing enterprise. Our hope is that the views presented here will stimulate others to contribute to this debate and we welcome comments, criticisms, alternative points of view or interpretations of these matters.

At this time when the WCC is engaged in a fundamental review and renewal of its commitment to social justice especially through its programme on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, many questions are being reopened which only a few years ago seemed fully resolved. As Christians know only too well, "new occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient truth uncouth". So today, because of new facts, new problems, and new responsibilities, the formulation of the Christian duty in society appears to be somewhat more complicated than we had previously supposed. In many situations it is said "there can be no peace without justice". But then there will be no peace because there are not one but many views of justice and these differences will not be resolved by some immediate Christian wisdom. It has been a temptation of the churches to retreat to broad and sweeping generalities which may satisfy some Christians but which in reality solve nothing. That would be a return to a type of moralizing from which the churches have suffered greatly in the past. The essays in this issue show that new thinking, new ideas, and new commitment are needed to face new duties. And it is one of the lessons of ecumenical history that where the churches have struggled together for ethical and spiritual renewal they have been given power to live and act faithfully in the midst of great political and social disorder.

We are grateful to Paul Abrecht, former director of the WCC's Church and Society sub-unit, for helping with this issue of the *Review*.

EMILIO CASTRO

Breakthrough in Ecumenical Social Ethics

The Legacy of the Oxford Conference on Church, Community, and State (1937)

John C. Bennett

The Oxford conference on "Church, Community, and State" is widely regarded as of great importance in the development of ecumenical thought about the social and political responsibility of the churches. It is admired for the quality of the reports on the central issues of that time and as a source of guidance for Christian thinking today. It has had such favourable attention partly because many of those who participated as speakers or writers of reports were renowned as leaders of thought both in the churches and in the secular world,[1] like Reinhold Niebuhr, Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich, Max Huber, Sir Walter Moberly, John Maud, T.S. Eliot, Ernest Barker, John Mackay, John R. Mott, Hendrik Kraemer, Henry P. Van Dusen, Henry Sloane Coffin, William Temple, R.H. Tawney and Olive Wyon.

J.H. Oldham was largely responsible for the gathering of leaders and for the methods of preparation for the conference. He bypassed the ecclesiastical channels, working informally with small groups and individuals of theologians and laity. Most of his plans were adopted by the denominational leaders who supported the conference. Nils Ehrenström, a member of the staff of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, the ecumenical agency based in Geneva, which was the chief sponsor of the conference, wrote later that Oldham was "the chief architect and outstanding spokesman of the

• John C. Bennett is professor emeritus of Christian ethics, and former president of Union Theological Seminary, New York. References following passages quoted from the Oxford reports are to pages in the original English edition of *The Oxford Conference: Official Report*, ed. J.H. Oldham, Chicago, Willett, Clark & Co., 1937.

[1] There is a much-quoted passage by Prof. James H. Nichols, who was at the time professor of church history in the University of Chicago, in his *Democracy and the Churches* (Westminster Press, 1951). He wrote: "The authority of the Oxford reports was unprecedented, at least in Protestant social ethics, and their competence enabled them to rank with the best secular thought, a phenomenon scarcely seen since the seventeenth century."

Oxford project".[2] He was a major influence in selecting the officers of the five sections of the conference. His role as intellectual midwife in the ecumenical movement helps explain the high quality of the preparations for the conference. He ensured the participation from the UK of laymen like T.S. Eliot and the economist R.H. Tawney.

What I have said about the significance of Oxford may seem to be denied in our time by its limited constituency. The churches of Asia, Africa and Latin America were represented by only thirty persons, many of them missionaries from the West. The apparent absurdity of this can be explained in large part by the fact that the next year there was a truly global conference under the auspices of a parallel ecumenical movement, the International Missionary Council, in Tambaram, India.[3] At that conference there were hundreds of representatives of the churches of Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as scores of delegates from Europe and North America, and a large number of missionaries. The Tambaram conference discussed issues of faith and mission but also two subjects which were on the agenda of Oxford: church and state, and the church and the changing social order. This explanation does not suggest that Oxford was not seriously limited by the absence of third-world participation.

Also, I can find only 19 women among the Oxford delegates! What a change has come in fifty years! There was another important absence: delegates from the main Protestant churches in Germany who were denied permission by their government to attend. German theologians and church leaders did provide papers in preparation for the conference and attend a few preliminary meetings. The staff of the Universal Christian Council of Life and Work were in continuous contact with the German churches. The absence of delegates from the main German churches was a dark shadow over the conference, reminding it of the denial of all that it stood for by National Socialism and also of the danger of war. Three representatives of small German churches were allowed to attend and one of them spoke of the freedom of his church under the Nazi regime.

Also absent were official observers of the Roman Catholic Church who made important contributions to later conferences. But this was 25 years before the beginning of Vatican II which transformed the ecumenical situation.

The twenty-three Eastern Orthodox delegates had more influence than their numbers suggest. They came from branches of Orthodoxy under the Ecumenical Patriarch, from the Church of Greece and from several branches in Eastern Europe. The Orthodox Church of Russia was not represented but there were several Russian Orthodox churchmen in exile including Prof. Boulgakoff from Paris who was probably the most widely known.

The 1966 world conference on "Church and Society", held in Geneva under WCC auspices, showed how much the life of the churches had changed. Taking part in it were more delegates from the third world than from Europe and North America combined, more than would have been indicated by the size of the churches in that part of the world. There were also many delegates from the Soviet Union and Eastern

[2] Chapter by Nils Ehrenström in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill eds, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement (1517-1948)*, Geneva, WCC, 3rd ed., 1986, p.584.

[3] The International Missionary Council became part of the World Council of Churches at the New Delhi Assembly in 1961. Long before that the churches of Asia, Latin America and Africa greatly valued their membership in the World Council of Churches as symbolizing their equal participation in the ecumenical community.

Europe. There was a deliberate attempt to give churches in countries where most of humanity lives a full opportunity to make their contributions to the discussion of global problems, to the dialogues between North and South and East and West. Also at Geneva official Roman Catholic observers participated in the discussions.

As one looks back at the Oxford conference the question may well be raised why it was so important when its constituency was so limited. In large measure its significance lies in the quality of the reports and the eight volumes published on the subjects of the reports. The following sentences are a summary of my answer to that question. (1) Oxford absorbed some of the most important theological changes since the Stockholm conference in 1925. (2) Oxford faced the new and mind-changing problems created for Christians and all persons by the National Socialist regime in Germany, problems of church and state, church and race, and by anticipation, of church and war. (3) Oxford for that time faced the continuing problems of the universal church and the world of nations and took steps in the clarification of Christian thinking about war. (4) Oxford projected a Christian ethic for the economic order which is even now relevant to Christian thinking in the industrialized democracies. It has little to say about situations that may require revolutionary changes but the ethic that it projected would be relevant to thinking about the long-term direction of such changes.

Oxford and Stockholm

Oxford has always been contrasted with Stockholm. The difference is that Stockholm was dominated by what turned out to be a simplistic idea: Doctrine divides but social cooperation unites. It concentrated on the social responsibility of the churches, assuming that doctrinal discussions could be left to the Faith and Order movement which held a series of conferences, one of which was in Edinburgh, also in 1937. This assumption had some truth as far as the Anglo-Saxon liberal churches of that period were concerned. The social gospel had considerable momentum in the United States and it had great influence in Stockholm. In spite of the tragedy of the First World War and profound moral frustration because of its results, adherents of the social gospel (of whom I was one) were still very optimistic about realizing aspects of the kingdom of God in history, as a result of human progress. A major influence at Stockholm was a series of conferences in England in 1924 on "Christian Politics, Economics, and Citizenship". William Temple, later Archbishop of Canterbury, was the chief leader of this enterprise. He was a great representative of a socially prophetic interpretation of Christianity. As one who did represent the American social gospel at that time, I freely admit that Temple and his colleagues had a theologically more sophisticated understanding of the church in relation to society, but they too were more optimistic about possible Christian achievements in history than was the trend of thought at Oxford. Temple himself used to say how, for a time, he was troubled by Reinhold Neibuhr's views.

Nils Ehrenström says of the effect of Stockholm on British churches:

> Yet even in England the importance of the Stockholm Conference was recognized, as an international endorsement of the concern for the social responsibility of the churches which had been steadily growing in England for three quarters of a century, and as a revelation to the English churches of their own middle position between the "activism" of the Americans and the "other-worldliness" of the Germans.[4]

[4] Ehrenström, *op. cit.*, p.551.

Though Stockholm began with the assumption that social concern united while doctrine divides, at its first session it was confronted by a profound theological difference which made agreement on social responsibility impossible. An Anglican bishop from England expressed the hope that the kingdom of God could in large measure be realized in this world. A speaker from Germany stated the conviction that there was no relation between the kingdom of God and human efforts to achieve justice and peace in this world. He represented a small minority at Stockholm but his view was widely held at that time in the Protestant churches and it was the sort of theological difference that made cooperation on social issues difficult. Also, it was a kind of difference with which the Faith and Order movement had not been dealing. This was an extreme case of theological differences which were important for the agenda of the Oxford conference and one of the books published for it had the title *The Kingdom of God and History*.

In the two decades before Oxford there had developed on the European continent a revival of historical Protestant theology with Karl Barth as the great leader and stimulus. This theological revival stressed the transcendence of God, the prevalence of sin in persons and in human cultures and institutions, the uniqueness of the biblical revelation with its centre in Christ and the contrast between it and human wisdom and moral understanding. The relation between the kingdom of God and history was chiefly the contrast between them.

Oxford did not reflect Barth's own thought or any neo-orthodox system but it was much influenced by this new trend. In the United States Reinhold Niebuhr, who was very different from Barth, also challenged the prevailing liberal theology and the optimism of the social gospel. He responded in part to European developments in theology, but more to his discoveries of the meaning of biblical faith for persons and society, to such historical figures as Augustine and Luther, and to events in which he was involved as a startlingly new voice. He made one of the most influential addresses at Oxford interpreting the relation of Christian faith to secular political events. I think that his address and a very widely circulated paper by Emil Brunner, which was a chapter in the Oxford volume, *The Christian Understanding of Man*, did a good deal to mediate to the conference theological insights which mark the difference between Oxford and Stockholm. They, together with the world events on everyone's mind, created a greater realism in interpreting choices and confronting Christians in the world than had been characteristic of the kind of liberal Protestant theology that guided social concern and strategy in the churches.

I do not mean that most Americans and British at the conference had been converted to any stereotype of neo-orthodoxy or had become followers of Niebuhr, but they had come to raise new questions about their own social hopes and moral pretensions, and about the tragic dilemmas that history was forcing on them. They did not give up seeking to serve goals of the kingdom of God but they did not claim that they were establishing the kingdom. They hoped for the prevention of the most threatening evils, both war and the extension of political tyranny, and for good that might be a gift of grace amidst tragedy, for achievements that might be seen as "signs" of God's kingdom. Other-worldly pessimism was as much rejected as an uncritical idealism.

In one of the Oxford books, *Christian Faith and the Common Life*, Reinhold Niebuhr said what was assumed in much of the thinking at Oxford: "It is a dangerous theology... which does not recognize how dialectically the Kingdom of God is related

to the sinful world in every moment of existence, offering both judgment and a more excellent way in considering every problem of justice."[5]

Fresh insights on the nature of the church

The Oxford conference also prepared the way for fresh thinking on the nature of the church and its relations with the world. It was not the business of the conference to discuss ecclesiastical doctrines. That was the role of the Faith and Order movement. But Oxford did lead towards a better understanding of the church as a present and universal reality. In a volume published in connection with the conference entitled *The Church and its Function in Society*, J.H. Oldham and W.A. Visser 't Hooft set forth ideas which were basic to the discussion of the church as an existing ecumenical community. After an exposition of the many doctrines of the church in various traditions, they came to the conclusion that "there are certain important points upon which all these churches which are taking part in the ecumenical movement are agreed". Those who knew both authors will find it significant that they agreed! Their statement of those important points is as follows:

1. All consider that the Church is not merely a human organization, but a community of which Jesus Christ is the Lord, and in which He is at work. In other words, all conceive of the Church as an object of *faith*.
2. All agree that there is essentially only *one* Church, since there is only one Lord. As a reality of faith, the word Church has no plural.
3. All agree that the Church in which they believe is not exhaustively expressed in any given church Body.[6]

I believe that those three convictions and attitudes were learned by many who had the Oxford experience and by many others who were later influenced by Oxford. Many of us from the United States, including myself, brought back what were for us new insights concerning the nature of the church and wanted to emphasize that there are several ways in which the *oneness* of the church can be embodied institutionally. Today this becomes most evident when schemes of church union vest large powers in one inclusive body whatever it is called. It is difficult to translate the oneness of faith into forms of ecclesiastical power.

The ecumenical community was truly experienced as church at Oxford in spite of differences of structure and of doctrine concerning the church. A faith was shared that was deeper than differences. Oxford was a worshipping community. It was a theological community seeking the truth about God, humanity, and the world.

In spite of all doctrinal inhibitions the Anglican authorities invited all baptized Christians to a eucharist in St Mary's Church. That event pointed beyond the existing ecclesiastical situation.

The phrase "Let the church be the church" has often been used to express the spirit of Oxford. It does not appear in that exact form in the reports but the Message of the conference said the following: "The first duty of the church, and its greatest service to

[5] Reinhold Niebuhr's chapter entitled "Christian Faith and the Common Life" in an Oxford conference book with the same title is a very inclusive statement of the ideas that he brought to the conference. This passage is on p.90.

[6] J.H. Oldham and W.A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Church and its Function in Society*, an Oxford conference book, pp.88-89.

the world, is that it be in very deed the church — confessing the true faith, committed to the fulfilment of the will of Christ, its only Lord, and united in him in a fellowship of love and service." Those words do not express the spirit of triumphalism which might be read into the shorter phrase, but call for the freedom of the church from false authorities of state or culture and for the self-criticism that pervades these reports.

I shall now deal with the themes which were a large part of the Oxford agenda and were subjects of discussion in sections and reports.

Church and community

The first two reports of the conference were on church and community, and church and state. Together they lift up a much-needed distinction between community or nation and state, a distinction that totalitarian patterns of the state tend to ignore.

Community is also distinguished from "association" which is a group with special interests which people choose to join. Community is defined in the longer report as "the whole of a people living continuously in one area when, as such, they share a common social life and form. It is something to which one is born, not something which one chooses to join" (204). Americans who belong to a nation of immigrants who remain on the move learn that the last sentence is an overstatement but the main point is valid in distinguishing community from association.

This community of neighbours who are in so many ways interdependent Oxford called a "gift of God" and within it are our primary loyalties and responsibilities: from our experience in community we become social beings. But immediately the conference gave the other side of the picture. All forms of community from family to nation, while gifts of God, "partake of both good and evil; they are of God and also of human sin". "Man's pride, greed, fear, idolatry infect them all" (58). Throughout the Oxford reports we find strong expressions of a very realistic view of humanity which is the product of everyday experience and of large events illumined by theology. It is not dogmatic pessimism or cynicism, far from both, but sees humanity as characterized throughout by ambiguity, one of Reinhold Neibuhr's favourite words.

This report deals with the difficulty of deciding when the primary loyalty to family, to neighbours nearest to us and to nation conflicts with loyalty to God. The abuses of loyalty to community are universal in our secularized society which generally lives at least on the edge of idolatry. The church itself is infected by this and often gives it religious sanction. All Christians are called to repentance as they see themselves in the light of the claim upon them of God as revealed in Christ. This report emphasizes the special evils in the nationalistic and racist idolatry of National Socialism without mentioning it or Germany by name.

Some of the preparatory materials written by Germans used the word *Volk*, which in the German context often referred to both nationality and race. The conference made a clear answer to this when it said that "to see in one's own people (one's own blood) the saving revelation of God is anti-Christian" (64). In those words the conference condemns one of the extreme and heretical parties in the German church who were known as "German Christians". The report says that "the recrudescence of pitiless cruelty, hatred, race discriminations (including anti-Semitism) in the modern world is one of the major signs of its social disintegration. To these must be brought not the weak rebuke of words but the powerful rebuke of deeds" (62). I think that "anti-Semitism" may have been put in parentheses because there was some debate as to

whether that should be regarded chiefly as a racial or religious category. It is both. The long report said "that there is a special need at this time that the Church throughout the world bring every resource at its command against the sin of anti-Semitism" (218). That seems obvious now in the light of our knowledge of the holocaust as the horrendous consequence of that sin. Later the splendid statement of Vatican II condemning the traditional religious roots of anti-Semitism gave great force to the church's witness against anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism. The Oxford statement was more prophetic at that time than it seems when we read it today.

The longer report[7] included a fuller discussion of "The Church and Race" as a global problem without mentioning particular countries. For example, it is said that in the relations between people of different races "all the deep human loyalties and prejudices... come to most extreme and dangerous expression... that there are deep-seated antipathies and apprehensions peculiar to race relationships". The Christian response to them is "the affirmation that all men are by birthright children of God created in his image, and therefore brothers and sisters of one another". As a judgment upon racially exclusive views of the church it is said that "they are intended by God to be brought within the fellowship of his one true church" (213-214).

In the last fifty years we have been so much aware of the unjust discriminations and the cruel effects of racism, benefiting in this awareness from the powerful testimony of members of non-white races themselves, and we have been so keenly aware of how often churches have been racist, not least in the United States, that we may be thankful that in 1937 the Oxford conference gave such a clear corporate witness.

Church and state

The delegates at Oxford came from countries with very different histories in regard to the legal relation between churches and the state. In the minds of all was the repression of religion in Hitler's Germany. The report on church and state does not mention particular countries but there are references to totalitarianism and a description of the nature of the state says that the state "by its very power and its monopoly of the means of coercion often becomes an instrument of evil" (67). The conference sent a message to the German church, mourning the absence of its representatives. This message also said: "We are greatly moved by the afflictions of many pastors and laymen who have stood firm from the first in the confessional church for the sovereignty of Christ, and for the freedom of the church of Christ to preach his gospel" (259). It is notable that the conference identified itself with that part of the German church which was most clearly involved in resisting the attempts of the state to control the church. Prior to the conference in the negotiations between its organizers and leaders of the German church there had been efforts to prevent the conference from taking sides in the internal conflicts in that church.[8]

[7] The drafting committees of two sections (Church and Community and Church and State) supplied additional reports of considerable length based on the discussions of their sections and on original drafts sent in advance to the conference. These additional reports, unlike the main reports, were not presented to plenary sessions of the conference but were believed by the drafting committees to be in harmony with the results of the discussions in their sections.

[8] The letter used the phrase "the confessional church" but the description of it fits the group known as "the confessing church" which was very much aware of its distinctiveness and is associated with Niemöller and Bonhoeffer.

The report on church and state affirmed the given realities of both church and state with each having its proper functions. It is said that the state has the God-given aim of "upholding law and order, of ministering to the life of the people united within it... and also of making its contribution to the common life of all peoples" (66). In debates before Oxford much was said about those who held a much narrower view of the state, emphasizing chiefly its coercive role and regarding it not so much as a constructive agency as a dyke against sin. Oxford clearly rejected that narrow view and the reference to its "contribution to the common life of all peoples" is a rejection of a narrowly nationalistic view of the state corresponding to what is now called "the national security state".

The report does recognize a sharp contrast between the functions of church and state. This contrast is set forth in the following words:

> As it is the aim of the church to create a community founded on divine love, it cannot do its work by coercion, nor must it compromise the standards embodied in God's commandments by surrendering to the necessities of the day. The state, on the other hand, has the duty of maintaining public order and accepting the limits of the practicable (69).

Those words may sound like a sharp moral dualism as between church and state. The report as a whole corrects that impression. For example, in the context of the saying of Jesus about "rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's", it is said that "it is God who declares what is Caesar's. Therefore, whatever the choice must be, the Christian must always, whether as a member of the church or as a citizen, obey the will of God" (70). It is significant that Christians as citizens see the will of God as having a decisive claim on them as they decide what the state should do. This does not mean that they should regard the state as a church or that they should make no prudential judgment about what is best for the state to do in a particular case, but it does mean that they must be critics of the state and seek to keep it under moral limits.

This last responsibility of the Christian citizen is brought out when the report outlines the church's duties to the state. These duties involve praying for the state and obedience to the state "with disobedience becoming a duty only if obedience would be clearly contrary to the will of God". Then there follows the role of the church in upholding "the standards of justice set forth in the Word of God and in criticizing the state when it departs from those standards" (70). Obviously the state is not seen as a morally autonomous order free from moral and religious judgments mediated by the church. And the surest test of this is that the church as a universal society does not recognize in the particular state of which members of a particular church are citizens as the ultimate political unit. Though Oxford has much to say about the secularizing of society during the previous fifty years, we in our time have done more thinking about the relation of Christian ethics to morally sensitive secular judgments and even more about the effect of religious pluralism on the political judgments of Christian citizens.

There is in the report a summary of all aspects of religious liberty: from freedom of private and public worship, preaching and teaching, to freedom to cooperate with churches in other countries. It is emphasized that churches that are in the majority and which in some countries are established churches should renounce all use of the coercive power of the state to limit the civil and political equality of minority churches

(72). This had great importance for some of the churches represented at the conference and the statement on religious freedom of Vatican II was a powerful affirmation of the religious freedom of all churches. We may say that this Vatican statement made such acceptance of religious freedom unanimous and removed what Protestants had seen as a barrier to the inclusion of the Roman Catholic Church in the ecumenical community of which the Oxford conference was a partial embodiment. However, in many situations social pressures on religious minorities remain which laws and formal teachings do not directly or quickly prevent.

The final sentence in the report calls upon all Christians to renounce "publicly and forever the use of all forms of persecution whether by Christians against other Christians or by Christians against the adherents of other religions" (74).

The universal church and the world of nations

The conference report on "The Universal Church and the World of Nations" offers as fundamental diagnosis what we would today accept under different circumstances. For example, it decried the primacy of national sovereignty in words which are still too true: "In so far as the present evil is political, the heart of it is to be found in the claim of each nation to be judge of its own cause" (157). There was then also the aspiration for peace, but more than people today those delegates who had themselves experienced the First World War were haunted by the fear that another world war might be very near. In fact it began two years later. They saw value in the League of Nations but by that time its credibility had been greatly eroded. The report said one thing about criticisms of the League which would apply today in large measure to criticisms of the United Nations: "Those who criticize the League for what it has done or failed to do are really criticizing the governments of member states or certain particular governments" (160).

In power conflicts in the contemporary world national sovereignty is still the primary fact. Yet I would suggest that today there is some hope in the continuous monitoring by the media of what nations do or even intend or plan to do. This produces pressure that puts nations on the moral defensive when they engage in flagrant acts of aggression or intervention in one another's national life. We cannot always count on this to work but it does create inhibitions and it does exact a price from nations that ignore it. The pressure is strongest when it coincides with strong movements of public opinion in the criticized nation. To some degree this was true of the United States in the case of the Vietnam war, and though the role of national public opinion is less in the Soviet Union the pressure upon it of a very wide public opinion outside, including in the third world, because of the invasion of Afghanistan has exacted a price from that country. It is not possible now to know what its effects may be, when combined with the Soviet Union's frustrations in the war. The fear of the escalation of any military action into nuclear war is one factor in the mobilizing of this inhibiting pressure upon the great powers.

In 1937 there was a cold war between Western Europe and Hitler's Germany. This cold war involved a more immediate threat of all-out war than does today's cold war between the West and the Soviet Union. There was less hope of a reversal of Nazi policies than there is today of a modification of Soviet policies or of increasing diversity in the communist world. That is a long story and it is not only the Soviet Union that needs to change.

I raise the question whether there is a parallel between the policies of Oxford in relation to Germany and the much-criticized silence of the recent Assemblies of the World Council of Churches in regard to violations of human rights, including religious freedom, in the Soviet Union. The Oxford reports speak in general terms of totalitarian developments, of anti-Semitism, of cruelties of governments against minorities, but they do not criticize particular nations. In the case of the World Council Assemblies, there was concern that delegates from the Soviet Union might suffer reprisals when they returned home and that the conditions of their religious institutions would be worsened. In the case of the Oxford conference it may have been a concern to avoid alienating parts of the German church in the bitter conflicts within that church. However, Oxford did depart from this policy in sending to the German church through a delegation from the conference a message which singled out for special support the suffering members of what it called "the confessional church". Nils Ehrenström, who was in a position to know, in his historical essay says it meant what would have been more accurately called "the confessing church" associated in our minds with such leaders as Niemöller and Bonhoeffer. So, the conference did take sides in the conflicts within the German church.

The conference in one short paragraph hinted at a theme which would be a major one today, saying that one of the causes of war is economic injustice. The report said only the following: "The unequal distribution of natural bounties is one of the causes of war, if control is used to create a monopoly of national advantages. Christian people should move their governments to abstain from such policies and to provide reasonable equality of opportunity" (159). In 1937 delegates who were mostly from Europe and North America were talking to each other in the absence of representatives of most of the people in the world who were excluded by the colonial powers from even being on the road to such equal opportunity. But as we shall see these delegates were very sensitive about the defects of their economic systems and have much to say to this generation in that same world. And some years before they would probably have said that mistakes by the victorious powers after the First World War and their economic effects in Germany were in part responsible for the rise of National Socialism and hence for another war that was feared. But in 1937 National Socialism combined with Germany's power had become such a threat in itself that its original causes were largely forgotten. How remote Oxford was from the worldwide call today for the linking of peace and justice!

The church and war

I believe that the most important contribution to current thinking on matters of international relations was the work of a sub-group on "The Church and War" that was led by Dr Visser 't Hooft who was soon to have so great a role in the ecumenical movement.

The section is notable for two main emphases. The first is its absolute condemnation of war which should always be recognized as sin even when persons decide to participate in a particular war as a lesser evil. Seldom has the dilemma involved in such a decision been so strongly expressed. The following sentences have often been quoted: "War involves compulsory enmity, diabolical outrage against human personality, and a wanton distortion of the truth. War is a particular demonstration of the power of sin in this world and a defiance of the righteousness of God as revealed in Jesus

Christ and him crucified. No justification of war must be allowed to conceal or minimize this fact" (162). The startling element in that passage is that it combines such an extreme condemnation of war and yet admits that it may at times be justified. What a heavy burden of proof it puts on such justification!

The second emphasis of Oxford is the clear statement that there is no one Christian view of the citizen's responsibility in the case of a particular war. I wonder if there has ever been as full an acceptance of absolute pacifism as one of the legitimate positions in regard to war in a document representing the major Protestant denominations.

This report announces that there are three possible Christian positions. One is absolute pacifism. The second is a form of the doctrine of the "just war". The third starts with the rightful authority of the state and gives this such a great moral advantage that it would be very difficult to disobey it. Yet it is admitted that a time for disobedience may come "when a person is absolutely certain that his country is fighting for a wrong cause — for example, in case of unjustifiable war of aggression...." A major difficulty even in such a case is that the state usually controls the information on which a Christian citizen must base his or her judgment.

The second view involving just versus unjust wars provides two grounds for the possible support of war. The first is that it must be justifiable in terms of international law. "Wars against transgressors of international agreements and pacts are comparable with peace measures and Christians are obliged to participate in them." The second ground on which war can be justified is that it is waged to vindicate what persons believe to be "an essential Christian principle: to defend the victims of wanton aggression or to secure freedom for the oppressed" (164).

I doubt if the third position which grants so much authority to the state to determine the obligation of the Christian citizen would now be set forth as in principle a separate Christian option in a comparable ecumenical document.

It is ironic that many of those who would have most strongly supported it at the time were Lutherans in Germany, many of whom a few years later became convinced that it was their duty to resist their state in time of war. Some of them were generals who were implicated in the attempts to assassinate Hitler.

Entirely missing from this whole discussion of the "just war" is any emphasis on justice "in bello" or any criteria of justice for the means of conducting a war. The emphasis is on whether or not the cause for which a war is fought is just. The present situation is controlled by what we know of the destructive effects of nuclear weapons not only in the number of immediate casualties but even more in the damage to the environment, to the support systems for living in the belligerent nations and among their neighbours who may have no part in the conflict. The arguments given in favour of the justice or rather the justifiability of a war in terms of cause may be invalidated when all the direct and indirect or delayed destructive effects of the means used are considered. The idea of a "nuclear winter" has become a symbol for the effects of the escalation of the use of nuclear weapons on humanity as a whole or, under present conditions, at least on the belligerents and their neighbours in the northern hemisphere. Also, the increasing doubt concerning the likelihood of a nuclear war being kept limited increases the urgency of these considerations. The means by which a war is fought may defeat its purposes which many Christians may

regard as just, and impose an unjust fate on whole nations not involved, and unjustly deny the possibility of life for future generations. This dimension of the problem that is so clear to us could not be faced at Oxford in terms of our experience and knowledge.

The church and the economic order

I think that readers of the report on the economic order would be struck by the degree of its relevance to the problems of the economies of the industrialized democracies today. I have been struck by the similarities of the normative elements in this report with those in the pastoral letter of the US Roman Catholic bishops on the US economy published in 1986.[9] The four criticisms that the Oxford report gives of the "economic order in the industrialized world" which I shall later outline would be a good check-list for the moral weaknesses in that economic order today, though the degree of its relevance would vary from country to country. This report was written by persons who with few exceptions lived in industrialized democracies and so it has little to say to Christians living in countries in which massive poverty or political repression are the dominant realities. Its brief criticism of communist countries I will deal with later. The successor of Oxford, the Geneva conference of 1966, was very different because of the presence of many delegates who were seeking economic revolution in their countries. It is hard to believe that Geneva was only 29 years later, but the Second World War had come between them.

The report is based on two theological ideas. One is that the kingdom of God is the source of both hope and judgment. It is wrong to say that it has no relation to the goals of justice for which we are striving and it is wrong to identify it with some particular social system. Reinhold Neibuhr's influence is clear in the formulatiom of this position. The second idea is that justice rather than love is the standard by which the economic order should be judged and yet these are not to be separated because love should will justice. Justice is defined as "the ideal of a harmonious relation of life to life". It presupposes "the sinful tendency of one life to take advantage of another" and it seeks to check this tendency "by defining the rightful place and privilege which each life must have in the harmony of the whole and by assigning the duty of each to each". The process of achieving justice involves coercion in restraining the evil-doer. The realism that characterized Oxford in general is expressed in the statement that "it cannot be assumed that the practice of Christian love will ever obviate the necessity for coercive political and economic arrangements" (77).

The report discusses briefly the developments of modified forms of capitalism that have developed in democratic societies and presupposes the existence of economies which remain dominantly capitalistic. On the other hand, it refuses to identify Christianity with capitalism or any other system. It criticizes the churches for having become involved with the wealthier members of society and the alienation from the churches in some countries of those who have suffered most from capitalism. It calls upon the churches to repent of the blindness that has caused this alienation. It says that God has spoken to the conscience through radical movements which attack churches and that churches should not regard those attacks as directed against God.

[9] The pastoral letter of the American Roman Catholic bishops is available in a book entitled *Economic Justice for All*, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington DC.

The report presents three criticisms of "the actual development of communism" which Christians must "continue to resolutely reject". These are *utopianism* which expects the "fulfilment of human existence through the natural process of history", "*materialism* which derives all moral and spiritual values from economic needs and economic conditions", and the *disregard for the dignity of the individual* common to all totalitarian movements. On that last point it is noted that communism does differ theoretically from other totalitarian movements (86).

The report differs from ideas that prevail today in assuming that economic "plenty" is possible everywhere. We do not now know the extent to which it may be threatened by such external factors as the growth of population or whether the standard of living in the wealthier countries will ever be possible in developing countries. My experience is that discussion of those issues became more important after 1950.

The report in speaking of goals says that "the direction of Christian effort in relation to the economic order should henceforth be turned from charitable paternalism to the realization of more equal justice in the distribution of wealth". And it says that Christians who live in more privileged geographical areas "cannot escape some measure of responsibility for those areas where for years to come there will doubtless be desperate economic need". That seems to have been tacked on as a small concession by persons who at that time were chiefly concerned about justice in the industrialized West.

The four criticisms of the economic order in the industrialized world (86-92)

1. *The enhancement of acquisitiveness:* This economy emphasizes success in making profit which leads to a "scramble for money". "In so far as the pursuit of monetary gain becomes the dominant force in the lives of men, the quality of life undergoes a subtle disintegration."

2. *Inequalities:* There is much emphasis on the extreme inequalities in the way industrialized society distributed wealth and the resulting deprivations for the majority of people. One goal is emphasized: "Christians cannot be in doubt as to the primary duty of insuring that the conditions required for full personal development are enjoyed by the whole of the rising generation." There is emphasis on the variety of conditions in the different countries. It is noted that "disadvantages are greatly increased where economic opportunities are denied on racial grounds".

3. *Irresponsible possession of economic power:* This takes too many forms in different situations to be described here. It tends to preserve injustice. Much is made of its effect on personal character. It produces a dictatorial temper in some and servility in others. It makes many "bitter and cynical".

4. *The frustration of the sense of Christian vocation:* People are "directly conscious of working for the profit of the employer (and for the sake of their wages) and only indirectly conscious of working for the public good". Many workers must produce "shoddy" or "destructive goods". Some are engaged in deceptive advertising. A major problem is unemployment which creates a sense of "uselessness".

While recognizing the degree of relevance of these four criticisms in various times and places, can we have any doubt that they provide a check-list by which to estimate the moral quality of economic institutions today as much as in 1937?

The writers of this report were not agreed as to whether the goal should be the reform of capitalism or the substitution for it of a system based upon the social

ownership of the means of production. Among those who preferred the latter there were many different views about "the degree of socialization of property required by a technical civilization" (95). As I have said, none claimed the identification of Christianity with either approach. There was however agreement that communism as practised did involve the supplanting of irresponsible economic power by irresponsible political power (95).

Because of limits of space I shall present only two other aspects of the report: the discussion of property and some elements in the discussion of the role of the church.

I think that all that is said about property (100-102) has significance because it is in sharp contrast with the then current views in some countries that regarded the free enterprise economy as an almost morally autonomous system, especially so in its distribution of property. The underlying theological conviction is that all the earth's resources are gifts of God to the whole human race and should be used "with due and balanced consideration for the needs of present and future generations". Existing property rights are relative and contingent only. They must be criticized in the light of the "largely non-moral processes by which they have been developed". There must be a clear distinction between property for personal use and property that gives people power over others. The latter form of power is in "special need of moral scrutiny".

The following may be an interesting example of what happens at an ecumenical conference. I was secretary of this section. I happened to meet Archbishop William Temple on the street. He had read a draft of our report and he suggested to me the following sentence which was added to it: "Every argument in defence of property rights which is valid for Christian thinking is also an argument for the widest possible distribution of these rights" (101). That sentence alone shows the contrast between the teaching of Oxford on property and the prevailing assumptions in countries controlled by a strongly capitalist ideology.

I have already referred to similarities in the normative elements of the Oxford report on the economic order and of the pastoral letter of the US Roman Catholic bishops on the economy in the United States. The similarities are present in the discussion of property, of inequalities, of the economic and psychological effects of unemployment, of poverty and especially its effect on the opportunities of children to develop their capacities, and of the worldwide responsibilities of Christians in the richer nations. In more general terms, in both documents we have a strongly expressed alternative to the assumption today in some countries that the free-enterprise system is almost morally self-sufficient. I will follow the Oxford example and not name the countries! It is remarkable that these two documents, forty-nine years apart, one primarily Protestant and the other Roman Catholic, support each other in providing the main outlines of a Christian economic ethic.

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The Oxford conference took a final action that had a permanent result. There had been much thinking about the need for a World Council of Churches. The conference chose a committee of seven members who later met with a similar committee chosen by the Faith and Order conference in Edinburgh. These two committees called a

special ecumenical meeting in Utrecht in 1938 which began the process of uniting these two branches of the ecumenical movement in order to form the World Council of Churches. For ten years, because of the war, the Council had an active existence "in the process of formation". It came into full existence at the Amsterdam Assembly in 1948. Each Assembly of the World Council has had as a part of its agenda the continuing discussion of the social and political responsibility of churches as these have been perceived from decade to decade.

From Oxford to Vancouver

Lessons from Fifty Years of Ecumenical Work for Economic and Social Justice

Paul Abrecht

> The historic drop in the stock market was the result of the bearing down of a series of fundamental forces... and the failure of market participants either to learn from or remember the lessons of history.... We should not be surprised that this is so. There are few schools of business in the United States that teach financial history. How can we remember the lessons of history if we have not been taught them. (Henry Kaufman, investment banker)[1]

> Personally I'm always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught. (Winston Churchill)[2]

Introduction

The repetition of past errors is not confined to financiers and stockbrokers. The ecumenical movement and the churches also have trouble coming to terms with their history. The fiftieth anniversary of the Oxford conference comes at an opportune moment for reviewing the ecumenical witness on social issues for this is a time of increasing uncertainty and difference of opinion about the future direction of work in this field. Disagreement about ecumenical social policy has been building up for some time, reflecting also fundamental differences among member churches. There is a widespread demand for new lines of ecumenical action. On one side there is great frustration with the failure of the churches to be more effective in alleviating world poverty and oppression and in challenging the world economic system which is held to be responsible for it. Two books by influential ecumenical thinkers published in 1987 demand radical and new Christian approaches to world economic order.[3] Both claim to build on ecumenical experience. Yet both omit much of the ecumenical record on

● Paul Abrecht was director of Church and Society, World Council of Churches, 1949-83.

[1] "Warnings were there but History was Ignored", by Henry Kaufman, Chief Economist and Managing Director, Salomon Brothers Inc., *International Herald Tribune*, 27 October 1987.

[2] As quoted by Susan Baake Kelly, *Mastering WordPerfect*.

[3] Ulrich Duchrow, *Global Economy: a Confessional Issue for the Churches?*, Geneva, WCC Publications. And Charles Elliott, *Comfortable Compassion? Poverty, Power and the Church*, London, Hodder & Stoughton.

economic justice. Both base their proposals for change on ideas, especially with respect to economic ethics, which the ecumenical movement has examined and rejected in the past. On the other side of the debate are those in the churches favouring the political right who maintain that the ecumenical movement is engaged in promoting unrealistic and misguided programmes of radical economic change.

As a result of this conflict and confusion ecumenical work on social issues is almost at a standstill. Present staff alone are not responsible for this situation. These difficulties and disagreements were already apparent at the 1983 Assembly in Vancouver. The Assembly Issue Group on "Justice and Human Dignity" had great difficulty in producing a report acceptable to the Assembly. The plenary debate on its report revealed substantial theological and ethical differences. The Issue Group leaders found it impossible to prepare a new draft before the close of the Assembly.

On the recommendation of the Assembly the World Council has engaged the churches in a conciliar process of mutual commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. It is safe to predict that the credibility of this programme will depend on finding a new common understanding of the theological-ethical rationale for the churches' work for political and economic justice. This will not be an easy task because of the present diversity of opinion within the ecumenical movement. Indeed the ecumenical consideration of economic justice (like much of the secular debate about world economic order) is turning into a dialogue of the deaf — in so far as there is still a dialogue at all.

A review of the history of ecumenical social thought can, I believe, throw light on these present difficulties and clarify the theological, ethical and ideological differences underlying them. It is in that context that I offer some reflections on that history. For the purpose of this review I shall divide ecumenical thinking into four periods:

1) the commitment to social justice and peace (the pre-WCC period, 1925-38);
2) first WCC formulations of political and economic policy (1948-61);
3) a time of review (1962-68);
4) the period of liberation ecumenism (1969-87).

I shall have little to say about the first period because it has been covered so well in Prof. Bennett's article; more to say about the succeeding periods.

1. The commitment to peace and social justice (1925-38)

The ecumenical commitment to peace and social justice was not the result of a single event or meeting but emerged after more than 12 years of encounter and dialogue between differing views. There were two critical stages: (1) the original commitment of the Life and Work conference in Stockholm (1925); and (2) the theological and ethical clarification and elaboration of this commitment by the Oxford conference (1937). The Oxford meeting also proposed a method of Christian study and analysis of social problems emphasizing cooperation of theologians, ethicists, social scientists and other lay persons with insight on social issues. It is in this sense that Stockholm and Oxford can be understood as a unity in the formation of the ecumenical commitment to social justice — Oxford completing the pioneering step of Stockholm.

But these two meetings also represented in fact two poles — two contrasting perspectives or views of the Christian understanding of social justice: Stockholm the prophetic perspective turned into an idealistic vision of Christian action in society; Oxford the perspective of Christian "realism", with its focus on the problem of relating

the ultimate insights of the gospel to prevailing social realities and possibilities, underlining the impossibility of realizing complete social justice within history.

The hallmark of Stockholm is the oft-quoted paragraph in its report emphasizing the practice of social justice:

> The sins and sorrows, the struggles and losses of the Great War and since, have compelled the Christian Churches to recognize, humbly and with shame, that "the world is too strong for a divided Church". Leaving for the time our differences in Faith and Order, our aim has been to secure united practical action in Christian Life and Work.[4]

The hallmark of Oxford is its theological understanding of the ambiguity of attempts to achieve social justice, an ambiguity which nevertheless heightened the importance and seriousness of Christian work in this field:

> The principle of justice has both a positive and a negative significance. Negatively, principles of justice restrain evil and the evildoer. They must therefore become embodied in systems of coercion which prevent men from doing what sinful ambition, pride, lust and greed might prompt them to do. This necessary coercion is itself a root of new evils, since its exercise involves power and power tempts the possessor to its unrighteous use. Furthermore, coercion may rouse resentment among those coerced even when its purpose is a necessary social end... it cannot be assumed that the practice of Christian love will ever obviate the necessity for coercive political and economic arrangements.[5]

Some contemporary ecumenical leaders stress these fundamental differences between Stockholm and Oxford in describing the early ecumenical commitment to social justice, interpreting them to mean that Oxford represented a break with the essential Christian vision of Stockholm.[6] In their view, Stockholm should be regarded as the real touchstone for ecumenical social concern because it highlighted the fundamental covenant between churches to work for social justice. By comparison Oxford, in its theological, ethical and policy decisions, interpreted this covenant in a Western theological and social-ethical perspective, reflecting predominantly Western political-economic experience and concerns.

That there are differences in outlook between Stockholm and Oxford is obvious. But both meetings were "Western" in participation and outlook. Moreover, as Bennett makes clear, the vision of Stockholm was extremely nebulous and open to diverse and even conflicting interpretations. Some of the leaders of the Stockholm conference recognized that they had failed to undergird their vision of the ecumenical church acting for justice in the world with any common theological and ethical understanding; they had also failed to show how the Stockholm vision might be interpreted and applied to specific problems of economic policy. Their disappointment in this regard is clear from their post-conference evaluations.[7]

The achievement of the Oxford conference was to find a way to resolve the important theological-ethical disagreements and disputes which blocked progress at

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[4] *The Stockholm Conference, 1925. The Official Report*, ed. G.K.A. Bell, Oxford University Press, 1926, p.711.

[5] *The Oxford Conference. Official Report*, ed. J.H. Oldham, New York, Willett, Clark & Co., 1937, p.77.

[6] K. Raiser, "From Stockholm 1925 to 1990: the History of Ecumenical Social Thought", in *Catalysing Hope for Justice: a Tribute to C.I. Itty*, ed. Wolfgang R. Schmidt, Geneva, WCC, 1987. And Ninan Koshy, presentation to JPIC meeting, Glion, 1986, published in *Ecumenical Press Service*, 25-31 October and 1-7 November 1987.

[7] Charles H. Brent, *Understanding*, New York, Longmans, Green & Co., 1925, see pp.11-20.

and after Stockholm. By emphasizing the provisional character of all Christian efforts at social and economic policy-making, the Oxford conference helped avoid the danger of churches making ecclesiastical/theological commitments to contemporary social-ideological fashions. By its emphasis on cooperation with the social sciences and on the contribution of the Christian laity, it helped to prepare the way for a new type of Christian social thinking, avoiding the kind of ecclesiastical pontification and moralizing on social and economic issues which had so often in the past characterized the churches' thought and action.

What is remarkable is how long the consensus of Oxford endured, indeed how much of it still applies. No other ethical approach or methodology has been articulated which has commanded a similar measure of ecumenical agreement or support. It remains still today an influential option in ecumenical social thought despite subsequent challenges from other theological-ethical views.

Yet the emphasis on the Stockholm pole also persists and is very much to the fore today, particularly, as I shall show later, in the contemporary period of liberation ecumenism.

2. First formulations of WCC political and economic policies (1948-61)

It is not surprising that the First WCC Assembly in Amsterdam (1948) followed closely the theological/ethical approach and method developed at the Oxford conference a decade earlier. Such ecumenical discussion as was possible during the war years largely confirmed the Oxford findings. Of those appointed in 1946 to the Assembly preparatory commission on "The Church and the Disorder of Society", the majority had been leaders at Oxford: John Bennett, Reinhold Niebuhr, J.H. Oldham, Emil Brunner, Nils Ehrenström and N. Berdyaev. To these were added such newcomers as Kathleen Bliss (UK), Jacques Ellul (France), M.M. Thomas (India) and C.L. Patijn (Holland), all of whom were to play a substantial role in the development of ecumenical social thought in the ensuing decade.

Building on the Oxford theological and methodological consensus, the Amsterdam Assembly's report on social issues analyzed the ethical problems facing the churches in the political-economic situation following the Second World War, and recommended that the WCC and the churches focus attention on three key areas: (1) the social concerns which should guide post-war political and economic reconstruction; (2) the churches' response to the Cold War and its ideological character; (3) the human problems associated with rapid technological change, especially in relation to the meaning of work.

In 1954, at the Second WCC Assembly (Evanston), this programme was substantially expanded to include a six-year study project on the churches and the problems of rapid social change in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. This study in fact continued up to and through the Third WCC Assembly in New Delhi, in 1961.

The 1948 Assembly proposed the idea of the Responsible Society as the social/ethical criterion linking and guiding all these concerns. The concept originated with J.H. Oldham and was understood and developed as a theological and ethical derivative of the Oxford approach. It proved a valuable guide to Christian thinking in the midst of the fierce theological-ideological battles of this period, helping the churches to resist the pressure from both sides for an absolute commitment in the world power struggle. It was a practical demonstration of the ability of the WCC to develop an independent

ecumenical perspective for viewing the world struggle without giving up its own fundamental concern for a just and democratic society.

Much has been written in recent years about the political-ideological assumptions underlying the term Responsible Society. That it was formulated in a time of struggle with totalitarianism is clear. However, in his essay on this theme for the Assembly preparatory volume, Oldham describes the many threats — cultural, ideological, economic and political — to a just and open social order. It was impossible, he wrote, to separate (as was often done in the USA and the USSR) "two things that belong inseparably together — liberty and equal justice". He defended the preference for a "free society" as follows:

> There is no reason why the free societies should not offer to men greater social justice than a totalitarian state. There are strong grounds for believing that it is only the free society that can in the long run ensure progressive approximations to social justice. It alone provides the opportunities by which men can discover by common discussion and experiment what social justice means and thereby progressively achieve it.[8]

The ecumenical movement could not prescribe for its members the actual political decisions they should make, but it could make clear some general principles which should guide Christian action. In Oldham's view the term "responsible society" was preferable to "free society" which was associated with old-fashioned laissez-faire liberalism. He enunciated its principles in some detail, and five of these may be cited as examples of his approach:

1. Christians must stand firmly for the freedom of men to obey God and to act in accordance with their conscience. This is the foundation of a responsible society.
2. To obey God men must be free to seek the truth, to speak the truth and to educate one another through a common search for the truth. Only through the freedom of its members to expose error, to criticize existing institutions and to express fresh creative ideas can society advance to fresh levels of life...
3. A belief in the responsibility of men to God and knowledge of human sinfulness will impel Christians to set restraints on irresponsible power and... to work for the widest distribution of power, responsibility and initiative throughout the whole community.
4. It must be the aim of a just society, exercising responsibility for all its members, to ensure that the material rewards of the common national enterprise are equitably distributed.
5. Political freedom (the freedom of a people to control, criticise and change its government) is the foundation and guarantee of all other freedoms. It is not the *source* of all freedoms... but so far as freedom in an earthly society is involved, no freedoms are in the long run secure without political freedom.[9]

The Assembly report in its definition of a Responsible Society succinctly summarized these principles:

> For a society to be responsible under modern conditions it is required that the people have freedom to control, to criticise and to change their governments, that power be made responsible by law and tradition, and be distributed as widely as possible through the whole community. It is required that economic justice and provision of equality of opportunity be established for all members of society.[10]

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[8] *The Church and the Disorder of Society*, preparatory volume for the WCC Assembly, New York, Harper & Brother, 1948, p.146.
[9] *Ibid*, pp.147-152.
[10] *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, W.A. Visser 't Hooft ed., London, SCM, 1949, pp.77-78.

At its first meeting a year after the Assembly, the new WCC Study Commission on Christian Action in Society published a statement on the political-economic implications of the Responsible Society, responding to the debate in various churches and countries concerning the Amsterdam critique of both communism and laissez-faire capitalism. It made even clearer the vital connection between freedom and social justice:

> The Responsible Society calls not only (for) a new combination of economic and political procedures (new in contrast to both a consistent Capitalism and a consistent Socialism or Communism), but also for a new spirit, a new sense of the values that are important. There is hope for the development of a responsible society where two convictions are held with equal force: first, that freedom lacks substance unless it is combined with economic justice and, second, that the quest for economic justice leads to new forms of oppression unless it is united with an insistent concern for political and spiritual freedom.[11]

In 1954 the Second Assembly, reflecting on six years of ecumenical experience with this concept, affirmed its own understanding and commitment as follows:

> Responsible Society is not an alternative social political system, but a criterion by which we judge all existing social orders and, at the same time, a standard to guide us in the specific choices we have to make. Christians are called to live responsibly, to live in response to God's act of redemption in Christ, in any society, even within the most unfavourable social structures.[12]

There is not space here to give a detailed account of all the ecumenical experiments made by the WCC between 1948 and 1961 in applying and giving expression and content to the Responsible Society idea in this very volatile political/economic period. Two issues dominated ecumenical attention in these years: (1) the churches' role in the Cold War (and the related discussion of a just economic order); and (2) the social-ethical issues arising from the movement for political and economic independence and self-determination in the countries of Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

By 1949 the Cold War had reached such a level of intensity that it preoccupied ecumenical social thought and action.[13] The decision of the Central Committee in 1950 to give moral support to the "police action" of the United Nations in resisting the invasion of South Korea in that year provoked much debate in and outside the churches. The post-war movement for European unity, which in these years involved many European Christian political leaders in a struggle to overcome European nationalism, was faced with a choice: to build a united Europe primarily as a barrier against the spread of communism to Western Europe (in the process emphasizing military resistance to Soviet military power); or to emphasize a Western Europe that would develop its own supra-national political identity, based on a just and democratic social order, as the primary response to the challenge of communism. In 1950 an Ecumenical Commission on European Cooperation, inspired by the Amsterdam idea

[11] *The Responsible Society*, pamphlet, published by the Division of Studies, WCC, p.7.
[12] *Statements of the World Council of Churches on Social Questions*, Geneva, WCC, 1st ed., 1955, pp.48-49.
[13] See for example W.A. Visser 't Hooft, "The World Council of Churches and the Struggle Between East and West", *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. 9, No. 13, July 1949. This paper was originally produced by Visser 't Hooft as a confidential memorandum to church leaders in the period just after the Amsterdam Assembly when the Cold War had worsened and resulted in increased harassment of churches in many East European countries.

of Responsible Society, was formed to help the European churches reflect on these issues from an ecumenical perspective. This group of Christian politicians and interested church leaders and theologians from practically every country of Western Europe continued to meet twice a year between 1950 and 1961.

In 1952, the newly formed department on Church and Society began to solicit views on the Christian witness in economic life. The book *Christianity and Economic Problems* (1956), by Denys Munby, an Oxford University economist, was undoubtedly the most notable contribution to this study.

As already noted, in 1954 the scope of the Responsible Society idea was enlarged to apply to the problems of the newly independent nations of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. In their nation-building efforts they also had to make the choice between capitalism, social democracy and communism. In later years it has sometimes been argued that the idea of the Responsible Society was so Western that it did not prove relevant to the situation in these newly independent countries. But in the period between 1954 and 1962 this was not the case. Many of the churches in these countries readily applied the Amsterdam-Evanston concept to the problems of their own societies, and in 1957 a study group of the newly formed East Asian Conference of Churches (EACC), meeting in Prapat, Indonesia, recommended that the Responsible Society in a World Perspective should be the basis of EACC work on social issues.

Perhaps the most significant indication of the large ecumenical consensus in this period of Cold War and the search for new and creative expressions of the Christian concern for justice and freedom is to be found in the report of the Political Commission of the World Student Christian Federation, *The Christian in the World Struggle*, published in 1952. This widely discussed report, written by M.M. Thomas of India and Davis McCaughey of the UK, contributed substantially to the theological development of the idea of the Responsible Society.

Were the idea of the Responsible Society and the programme that developed from it biased towards a Western perspective on the problems of world economic order and social justice? I believe the evidence shows that the concept evolved as it was applied to new problems arising in the changing world situation of these years. Thus it was able to express the preoccupations of the changing constituency of the WCC and contributed to making the political and social witness of the ecumenical movement a force for justice and peace in these years. Nevertheless, by the late fifties the world political and economic situation had greatly changed. The Cold War had taken a new turn. The 1956 uprising against communism in Hungary and its brutal repression brought, paradoxically, a decline of communist influence in Western Europe. But Western political prestige also suffered decline because of the Suez crisis; and in Africa and the Middle East the process of decolonialization led to bitter military conflict. The Algerian war indicated that not only communism but also European governments could threaten justice and freedom. And by 1962 the French war in Indochina had become the American war in Vietnam, a war which was to turn much of the third world against the USA. After 1960 the struggle against apartheid in South Africa became more violent following the Sharpeville massacre of that year. In defence of human rights the WCC had to challenge the position of some of its member churches in South Africa and three of these withdrew their membership a year later.

The Western countries (North America and Western Europe) also faced demands for radical social change, emanating especially from youth dissatisfied with life in

societies organized and dominated by a technological and exploitative approach to life and indeed to all of nature.

By 1960 the constituency of the WCC was also changing rapidly. At the Third Assembly in 1961, 29 new member churches joined the Council, practically all from the second and third worlds. This enlarging constituency was changing the substance and shape of ecumenism, most especially its political and social agenda.

Under these circumstances it became clear that there was need for a review of ecumenical social thought and its applicability to the new social situation. This was the basis for the 1962 proposal of the Department on Church and Society to call a world conference on "Church and Society" which would examine the rapidly changing world social situation and the adequacy of the Christian response. The plan involved a preparatory study period of three years, a world conference in 1966, a two-year follow-up discussion in the churches and a report to the Fourth Assembly in 1968. The plan was approved at the 1962 meeting of the WCC Central Committee meeting in Paris. It is to this "time of review" that we must now turn.

3. A time of review (1962-68)

Not since the Oxford conference of 1937 had there been a world ecumenical meeting to review the social issues facing the churches and their response. The Assemblies of Amsterdam and Evanston had provided limited opportunity for substantial dialogue and policy-making on social issues, and the Third Assembly in New Delhi was particularly meagre in this regard. Despite efforts to correct the imbalance, the large majority of Assembly participants have always been clergy and other church leaders with, at best, a modest number of lay persons. In such a setting, new and creative thinking about social and political responsibility is practically impossible unless there has been careful selection and preparation of issues in advance. By contrast, the 1966 world conference was designed to allow for a majority of Christian lay participants representing the social sciences, political and economic affairs and also the fields of science and technology. There were also increased numbers of youth and women; church leaders, theologians, and teachers of Christian ethics comprised less than half of the 425 participants. This distribution of participants in itself made it a unique and innovative meeting.

Perhaps even more important, while "first-world" Christians had played the dominant role in the earlier meetings, the conference of 1966 was planned as an occasion for a worldwide review of social problems by Christians from the first, second and third worlds.

It was also the first opportunity for many churches from Eastern Europe, for example those of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria and Romania, to take part in a world ecumenical meeting on social questions. Churches not yet members of the WCC (Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist (USA), Conservative Evangelicals) were also invited to participate as observers.

A unique process of consultation with the member churches in the selection of their participants produced a balance of theological and ethical competence, intellectual depth, and involvement in the struggle for social justice. In 1965 a proposed list of 400 participants with alternatives was submitted to the WCC Central Committee for its advice and comment. Thus the member churches had a final check on the list of those invited.

The Preparatory Committee, in its first message to the churches about the scope and purpose of the conference, pointed to the difficulties and controversies facing the Christian world community:

> It is evident that there is basic disagreement in the churches about the significance of the (political and social) events and their interpretation. This is partly due to the diversity of culture and history and to the ideological conflicts which divide our world: but it also represents serious differences regarding the meaning of our common faith for social thought and action. Therefore there is need for a deeper Christian dialogue involving all the churches, in which, among others, theologians, representatives of the human sciences, and those involved in theoretical and practical ways of developing new forms of society participate.[14]

Such considerations lay behind the extensive preliminary discussion about the topics to be included in the programme and how they were to be prepared. Even the title of the conference provoked debate: eventually three possible titles were proposed to the WCC Central Committee, which indicated its preference for "Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time". It was also agreed that there should be four main themes: (1) economic development in a world perspective; (2) the nature and function of the state in a revolutionary age; (3) structures of international cooperation — living together in peace in a pluralistic world society; (4) man and community in changing societies (dealing especially with issues of race, women and men, and modern urban living); and three sub-themes: (a) potentialities of the contemporary technological and scientific revolution; (b) theological issues in social ethics; (c) the church's action in society.

It is not possible to go here into all the encounters, conflicts, problems and achievements of this wide-ranging conference, unique in the history of ecumenical discussion of social issues. The Anglican moral theologian, Prof. Ronald Preston of Manchester University, a veteran ecumenist, has described it thus:

> This could fairly be said to be the most thoroughly ecumenical conference ever held in the history of the Christian church. All the main Christian confessional traditions were well represented. Roman Catholic participant-observers played an active part; several had been involved in the preparation of the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*. The accession to the World Council of Churches in 1961 of the Russian and other Orthodox churches from Eastern Europe meant that Orthodox representation was much increased. The membership was so arranged that those who came from the Third World countries were sufficiently numerous to be influential and not be made part of a process and an agenda that reflected the preoccupations of the "Christian" West.... lay folk were as numerous as clergy; and many of them were highly competent in their occupations. It is significant that the result of a conference set up in this way proved radical, so radical that many Christians from the "established" churches were disturbed by it, though in retrospect it does not seem so fearful now. Indeed its concerns have moved steadily more into the forefront ever since.... The upshot is that for the first time in centuries the churches have available some organized thought on social issues which is up to date to guide them.[15]

There is space here to focus only on those elements of the conference pertinent to later developments in ecumenical social thought. Clearly the most important of these was the conference discussion of the churches and revolutionary social change. It has been said many times, by friends and critics, that the conference endorsed "revolution-

[14] *Information Paper No. 1*, Department on Church and Society, WCC, January 1963, p.3.
[15] *Religion and the Persistence of Capitalism*, London, SCM Press, 1979, p.43.

ary change", that it favoured the selection of participants and speakers with a revolutionary outlook, and that it was thus the beginning of revolutionary social thinking in the ecumenical movement.

Indeed, there was at this meeting in Geneva in 1966 a vigorous debate on the Christian response to revolutionary change — cultural, political, economic and scientific-technical. Since the task of the conference was to try to understand and interpret this situation theologically and ethically and to determine the responsibilities of the churches and their members, there was no way it could escape a confrontation of views. That was what the conference was all about. And the debate which began at the conference would continue in the churches and in the WCC for many years and contribute substantially, as we shall see later, in ways not foreseen, to the growth of liberation theology and eventually to liberation ecumenism.

But while recognizing the challenge and appeal of some of the revolutionary ideas and social developments in the 60s the conference did not itself endorse general revolutionary action. Nor did it give up the Oxford-Amsterdam-Evanston theological-ethical understanding of the function of the church and the individual Christian in society. A brief paragraph in the Message of the conference suggests the differences and disagreements in outlook about revolutionary action by Christians which the conference was unable to resolve:

> As Christians we are committed to working for the transformation of society. In the past, we have usually done this through quiet efforts at social renewal, working in and through the established institutions according to their rules. Today, a significant number of those who are dedicated to the service of Christ and their neighbour assume a more radical or revolutionary position. They do not deny the value of tradition nor of social order, but they are searching for a new strategy by which to bring about basic changes in society without too much delay. It is possible that the tension between these two positions will have an important place in the life of the Christian community for some time to come. At the present moment, it is important for us to recognize that this radical position has a solid foundation in Christian tradition and should have its rightful place in the life of the Church and in the ongoing discussion of social responsibility.[16]

At the same time the conference made clear, in a statement on "A Theological Understanding of Social Change", that whatever the degree of support for revolutionary action taken by Christians, they could not escape the judgment of biblical faith on all human action. The conference report at this point echoes the theological and ethical insights of Oxford:

> The Christian knows by faith that no structure of society, no system of human power and security is perfectly just, and that every system falls under the judgment of God in so far as it is unable to reform itself in response to the call for justice of those who are under its power. There is no divinely ordained social order, and not every change, as such, nor every *status quo* as such, is necessarily good. There are only relative, secular structures subject to constant revision in the light of new human needs. There is in history a dynamic of evil as well as a dynamic of good. God's action is continually reshaping the order of human power, humiliating the proud and the rich and lifting up the oppressed.[17]

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[16] *Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time: the Official Report of the World Conference on Church and Society*, Geneva, WCC, 1967, p.49.
[17] *Ibid.*, p.200.

For every Christian:

> The task of bringing about effective social change, and of discerning in the protest of the poor and oppressed the relative historical justice at work is especially his. It may be his task to express the repentance to which he calls his own ruling group. Only then is he prepared for the witness he owes to the revolutionary: freedom from hatred — freedom to build a new world in which also the enemy will find a just place; freedom from self-righteousness — freedom to accept the give and take which must modify even revolutionary plans and power. For revolutions are also under judgment when they make their cause absolute and promise final salvation.[18]

Despite these carefully stated reservations the conference debate about "theology of revolution" created a controversy in and outside the churches, and two years later a consultation of 45 theologians and ethicists met to evaluate the Geneva conference findings on theology, social ethics and revolution. This meeting was organized jointly by the WCC Commission on Faith and Order and the Department on Church and Society. While appreciating "the fact of the revolutions" and the "Church's inescapable responsibility" to be involved in them, it endorsed the theological cautions in the 1966 report in these words:

> The revolutionary process of changing power structures is itself morally very ambiguous, especially when revolution involves violent actions. Even when unavoidable, violence remains a failure in the human capacity to manage evolution through word and persuasion, and is a source of destruction, cruelty and bitterness. Theology should help people to recognize the provisional character of violence even when it is considered necessary. Christian theology warns us against sacralizing either the *status quo* or the revolution.[19]

In view of this emphasis on the Christian critique of revolutionary action at and after the conference, it needs to be asked: What then is the nature and substance of the revolutionary thought of the 1966 conference? It was a pragmatic rather than an ideological radicalism. This is clear from the conference report on "Economic Development in a World Perspective", especially in the part dealing with "World Economic Relations", where the need for "radical action", to meet the moral responsibilities of worldwide economic and social justice, is stated in these terms:

> Technological progress gives mankind the possibility of eradicating want and misery from the face of the earth. If it is to do this, growth of power must be matched by growth of responsibility. Increasingly national economic policies have been geared to growth with social justice. The challenge of our times is to extend this understanding to the world community. All our fine phrases about "human solidarity", "one world", etc. sound hollow in the face of increasing international inequalities. If contemporary economic and social policies are failing to arrest this tendency, they must be radically altered. It is not enough to say that the world cannot continue to live half developed and half underdeveloped: this situation must not be allowed to continue. Therefore, all nations, particularly those endowed with great economic power, must move beyond limited self-interest and see their responsibility in a world perspective. The Church must say clearly and unequivocally that there is a moral imperative behind international economic cooperation.[20]

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[18] *Ibid.*

[19] "Theological Issues of Church and Society", statement of the Zagorsk Consultation, *Study Encounter*, Geneva, WCC, Vol. IV, No. 2, 1968, p.76.

[20] Official report, 1966 conference, *op. cit.*, p.80.

Examining the differences between economic systems, the report deliberately avoided the use of words like capitalism and socialism. Instead it spoke of "the market economy, the welfare state and the mixed economy, and the centrally planned economy"; it refused to make a moral judgment in favour of or against any one of them:

> All the above systems can, in their various ways, and with varying degrees of success, be employed to support the economic goals (of rapid growth and wide distribution of income).... The role of Christians is to be critical participants in the societies in which they find themselves.
>
> All these systems are changing, learning from each other, and apparently converging: they already have more in common than the more enthusiastic supporters of any one of them are ready to admit. All must deal with the uncertainties arising from their inability to predict accurately the long-run trends in the fields of population, consumer choices and technology. In all there is some planning. All operate within a framework of government activity; in all government expenditure absorbs a large part of the national income....
>
> Each of the above systems must be challenged by the churches on the way it meets human needs.[21]

A similar realism and pragmatism marked the findings of the report in relation to economic progress and justice in developing countries:

> In some countries economic development may demand a profound revolutionary change in the structure of property, income, investment, expenditure, education, and political and administrative organization, as well as in the present patterns of international relations. However there can be no universal prescription for economic development. In an age in which international economic development has become a social and political creed, the special problems of development within each country or region must be understood in terms of both the internal and external forces at play, and must be tackled in their own context and within that of the community of nations. Economic development is a common objective, but it is vain to search for simple formulae to understand it and a uniform pattern to achieve it.[22]

It was this pragmatic demand for economic justice and the changes that required that provided the guidelines for the discussion of world economic development at the Fourth WCC Assembly in Uppsala in 1968. As S.L. Parmar, the Indian economist and a leader in the 1966 and the 1968 discussions of this question, said to the Uppsala Assembly:

> We must move from a welfare state to a welfare world. We are not the first to say this. The United Nations and its specialized agencies, especially the UNCTAD, have been pushing for a global view. But so far this has only been a statement of intent and may soon become a pious platitude....
>
> Rightly understood, development is disorder because it changes existing social and economic relationships, breaks up old institutions to create new, brings about radical alterations in the values and structures of society. If we engage in development through international cooperation we must recognize that basic changes become necessary in developing and developed nations and also in the international economy. "Development is the new name for peace." But development is disorder, it is revolution. Can we attempt to understand this apparently paradoxical situation which would imply that disorder and revolution are the new name for peace?

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[21] *Ibid.*, pp.57-58.
[22] *Ibid.*, p.66.

> If we believe in progress and development let us not finish at disorder and instability. So often order provides a camouflage for injustice that the very quest for justice generates disorder. But we must live with this dilemma. Our task is to imbue the revolutionary movements of our time with creativity and divest them of their anarchic content. For neither disorder nor revolution is an end in itself. So too development. They are means to human betterment and establishment of a society based on justice.[23]

This period of review greatly expanded the range and depth of the ecumenical concern for economic justice. Through it the WCC succeeded in mobilizing the resources of the churches for new and more effective action in society. It accepted the need for new strategies and a new militancy in approaching the problems of the poor and the oppressed in a world perspective. At the same time it emphasized the need for policies based on an understanding of the growing complexity of economic and political life and the difficulty of finding easy answers. In this it maintained continuity with the past in method, in ethical criteria and in fundamental theological approach. This is not surprising; the leaders and staff of the 1966 conference were, generally speaking, followers of the Oxford-Amsterdam experience and insights. To them radical change might be necessary to achieve a greater measure of social justice; the problem was to obtain some consensus on the nature of that change at this given historical moment. The need for world economic development had posed this problem in a new and urgent way.

It has been said by some critics of the 1966 meeting that at that moment the social thought of the WCC had become so radical that it would lead to a break within the wider ecumenical fellowship, separating it from other Christian bodies like the Roman Catholic Church.[24] In fact, despite differences in style and method, the results of the 1966 conference resemble remarkably closely the message of Vatican Council II on the "Church in the Modern World". In these years (1964-1968) WCC and RC social thought seemed to be moving on closely parallel lines, where they were not in fact already converging.

But this time of review also gave a new voice to those who wanted militant action according to their understanding of the biblical criteria of an absolute option for the poor and the fulfilment of the gospel within history. They were impatient with the relative social ethics of Oxford, Amsterdam and Geneva. The revolutionary political and social situation in 1968 in Europe, America and in the third world strengthened this position. As a result the various parts of the ecumenical movement came under increasing pressure to make a more absolute and a more definitive commitment to radical political action for justice and freedom. Not surprisingly the World Student Christian Federation was the first segment of the ecumenical movement to be caught up in the debate and turmoil which such pressures produced. But the WCC was soon to experience similar demands for radical social action and after the 1968 Assembly there would be great changes in the programmes of the WCC in favour of "liberation ecumenism".

4. The period of liberation ecumenism (1969-?)

It is difficult to describe and even more difficult to evaluate this period because we are so close to it and the debates which surround it. Attempts by the WCC to produce a

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[23] *The Uppsala Report 1968: Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the WCC*, Geneva, WCC, 1968, pp.41-43.

[24] Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Churches?*, Abingdon, USA, 1967, pp.124-127.

historical survey of these years have foundered because of the problem of finding interpreters not strongly partisan, pro or con, in relation to particular developments or trends.

However there can be little doubt that this has been an important ecumenical period, featuring some outstanding contributions to Christian thinking on social issues and new forms of creative witness and ecumenical leadership. But, like the previous periods, it has had both successes and problems. One reason we can begin to write about it is that there are many signs that as a distinctive period it is nearly over, if in fact it has not already ended.

The principal features of liberation ecumenism, as a new approach to ecumenical social witness, are clear enough. They can be understood best as a response to the tumultuous situation in church and society in the late 60s and early 70s marked by the long and bitter liberation struggles in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique; the final violent stages of the war in Vietnam and Cambodia; the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China and the subsequent spread of Maoist revolutionary ideas, especially among young people, throughout the world; the revolutionary movements in Latin America and the subsequent struggles for social justice in Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, and the emergence of liberation theology as a Christian response to that struggle; the increasing racial tension in the United States culminating in the murder of Martin Luther King in 1968; and the counter-culture movements especially among young people in North America and Europe with their revolutionary critique of the materialist, technologically organized society.

In the midst of these struggles for freedom and justice, it appears, in retrospect, inevitable that churches should have been attracted to proposals for action in support of those engaged in radical transformations of society. The key areas for action were readily identified: opposition to racism, especially white racism; alleviation of the misery of the urban and rural poor in third-world countries; the need for a radically new economic relationship between North and South, especially regarding trade and aid; and perhaps most important of all, the demand for peace, and opposition to growing military power and expenditures on armaments. Not just the WCC but most churches in the West and in the third world were drawn into new action programmes in all these areas. Their main problem was to determine the precise form and content of appropriate action.

The WCC, as an organization, was itself, at this moment, entering an "action mode". In 1966, after a confused and drawn-out debate, it elected as its new general secretary Eugene Carson Blake, an American church leader. By comparison with his predecessor, W.A. Visser 't Hooft, a distinguished scholar and writer, Blake was an activist. He had been an outstanding leader in the struggle against racism in the USA and after the Uppsala Assembly he moved quickly to commit the WCC to action in support of the struggle for racial justice worldwide. This was followed by a similar commitment to the WCC's participation in campaigns for world economic development and for peace. These measures were consolidated by changes in the WCC structure which institutionalized the new "action programmes". At the same time the traditional ecumenical *study* approach to economic issues was replaced with a "reflection-action" style which was described thus in the new organizational plan adopted by the World Council in 1972:

> The new structure must surmount the old separation between study and action. Clearly full weight must be given to study, but its dispersal throughout the Council seems very desirable. It must be integrated into the work which is primarily "action" or service-oriented. This becomes particularly important in a time of great and rapid social change.[25]

Only when this formula was later transposed into "action-reflection" was there a hint of a fundamentally new way of thinking about ecumenical "study". When Philip Potter became general secretary of the WCC in 1972 he continued and strengthened this action emphasis. He also brought to it a significant third-world leadership.

In general these new action initiatives did not, in the beginning, seem to pose any particular ecclesiological or theological-ethical problems. The need for action in favour of social justice seemed self-evident, and the churches were almost unanimously in favour of it. The 1966 conference and the Uppsala Assembly had widened and strengthened the ecumenical commitment to social justice. The Programme to Combat Racism (PCR), approved in 1969, the first of the new action programmes to be organized, was based on the many previous ecumenical statements, analyses and declarations denouncing racial segregation and discrimination as a violation of the body of Christ. There could be little objection to action especially at a time when the struggle against racism involved the churches' own integrity. The only question concerned the substance of the programme and this was discussed at length before the PCR was approved.

A new-style Christian action for world economic development was somewhat more difficult to organize. Traditional interchurch aid structures and approaches were deemed unsuitable, and a new Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development (CCPD) was formed. The substantial financial support it required was soon provided by the churches. The readiness of the Vatican, working through its newly formed Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, to cooperate in launching a joint Roman Catholic-WCC programme on Society, Development and Peace (SODEPAX) opened the door to even broader Christian collaboration. Joint meetings in 1968, 1969, 1970 and 1971 produced a common theological-ethical understanding and a joint action programme. A study consultation in 1971 on "A Theology for Development", sponsored by SODEPAX, brought together a number of distinguished theologians to reflect on this issue. It was at this meeting that Gustavo Gutierrez, a Roman Catholic priest from Peru, first presented to the churches his views on "a theology for liberation", which were to have such a deep impact on Christian social thought and action in the following decade.

Over the next ten years many theological-ethical formulas in support of action initiatives were produced. A new style of theologizing — "doing theology" — appeared, encouraging action groups to reflect theologically on their own experience without feeling constrained by traditional theological systems. Out of this ferment came various participatory and praxis styles of interpreting Christian responsibility in the world, which would nourish Christian work with many social groups: the poor, the handicapped, the homeless, the oppressed of whatever country, race, age, sex or class. These created a rich diversity of thinking, as they also produced new, competing ecumenical concepts of love, justice and peace. This growing, vital, liberating activist

[25] *Minutes*, WCC Central Committee, Addis Ababa, January 1971, Geneva, WCC, p.158.

spirit spread also to many older WCC programmes: on international affairs, education, the role of women in the churches, and youth work. New staff were brought in to give activist leadership in these programmes.

Despite the enthusiasm in the ecumenical movement for action and the early achievements of the programmes it fostered, problems began to emerge, especially related to the theological-ethical approaches being followed. In the first half of this period (1969 up to the Fifth Assembly in Nairobi in 1975), these action programmes represented, for the most part, some measure of theological-ethical continuity with the past — an extension and development of all that had gone before; they embodied the ideals and goals of ecumenical social thought as it had evolved since the Life and Work days. Theological experimentalism, extreme contextualism in social ethics, and total commitment to particular activist recipes of social justice were kept under critical review within the World Council community. The ecumenical study tradition, with its emphasis on dialogue between opposing opinions, continued to operate despite the passion for action unencumbered by "elitist" reflection. A 1973 report on violence and non-violence in the struggle for social justice showed the value of independent examination of the ethical assumptions of militant action programmes and the danger of a too-easy acceptance of violence in the struggle for justice.

After the Nairobi Assembly the conflicts between diverse theological-ethical perspectives and between different political-ideological assumptions became more apparent and more difficult to resolve. WCC staff were increasingly divided about the substance of Christian social ethics. The emphasis on identification with the poor and the oppressed as the sole criterion for Christian action in society, the attempt to focus all ecumenical action on the struggle against classism, racism and sexism, seemed to many to oversimplify the problem of Christian action in society. By 1980 many of the churches which had originally been supportive of the action approach began to raise questions, especially about the theological-ethical assumptions on which it was based. The fate of the World Student Christian Federation, which in 1972 opted for a radical programme of political activism and had by 1975 lost much of its support and ceased to be an effective ecumenical witness to the world student community, was seen by some ecumenists as an omen of the dangers of a one-sided approach to world social issues. Perhaps most important of all, after 1975 the world political and social situation, which had inspired the action, was also changing, posing new and different challenges to ecumenical social thought. In the remainder of this article I want to look more closely at the various problems which arose in the second half of this period of liberating action (1975-1983) and especially at the emerging new social situation.

Questions about liberation ecumenism

It is possible to identify three principal theological-ethical schools of thought emerging from this action period which I have called liberation ecumenism, and which were especially pronounced after 1975. All three, in some measure, repudiated the earlier ecumenical consensus about social ethics.

First, a "love-based" idealistic ethic of justice and peace for which some advocates claimed the warrant of the Stockholm conference (1925). Given the earlier theological-ethical critique of this approach at the Oxford conference and subsequent WCC meetings, it is not surprising that it should prove, once again, impossible to build an *agreed* ecumenical social action programme on this basis.

Second, a populist (participatory) Christian social ethics based on an over-riding concern for the rights of the oppressed, perceived as a majority of the world's people. This included the racially and the economically oppressed as well as women and young people who felt, in different ways, dominated by the present world political-social system. These "poor" of the earth were perceived as God's people within history; they had a prophetic role, and through their protests and witness the true church would see its work of social salvation. By definition this was a conflictual approach: the world was divided between oppressors and oppressed and it was the duty of the church, working through the ecumenical movement, to be on the side of the oppressed. A Christian fellowship of oppressed and oppressors was impossible.

Many ecumenical leaders felt that this picture of the world was too simple. In a comment to the Central Committee of the WCC in 1973, M.M. Thomas said:

> I do not know whether I (and other members of the Central Committee or of the staff from the third world) belong to the oppressor group or the oppressed group. In India, where 40% of the people live below starvation level, I belong to the group which must be considered as sustaining the oppressive system, but in the world economic system I belong to a poor nation. I find myself an oppressor in some roles and an oppressed in others; most often I feel myself an oppressor. So the classification here is a little too neat. The truth is that we are all more or less alienated from the poor and the oppressed of the world, and are seeking together to overcome our alienation by being with Christ in his solidarity with them.[26]

If this is recognized, it changes our perspective as church:

> If the oppressor and the oppressed confront each other as a self-contained system of collective power versus a self-righteous movement of collective revolt, politics remains an area of inevitable war and violence. But if they see themselves — to use Metropolitan Anthony Bloom's phraseology — as "locked together in a single tragedy", and are prepared therefore to respond together in repentance to the offer of Divine Forgiveness and Fellowship in Christ, "it breaks through the awful logic of human power — the endless chain of wrong, retribution and new wrong — and transmutes it, despite itself", giving events a new direction.[27]

Other critics felt that the World Council was guilty of "selective indignation", giving less attention to the politically oppressed of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe than to the economically oppressed under the power of the capitalist system. They asked for a more comprehensive interpretation of oppression.

Third, liberation theology which makes use of the socialist (Marxist) view of history, and its interpretation of the causes of social injustice and conflict. Although none of the several versions of liberation theology was ever formally approved by the WCC, this thinking exercised great influence on ecumenical social thought in this period, especially through the contribution of prominent Latin American theologians. Their views were undoubtedly the most striking challenge to the Oxford-Amsterdam understanding of Christian social responsibility. They may be summarized thus: the World Council and other ecumenical agencies had, from the time of Oxford and Amsterdam, implicitly, if not explicitly, favoured the ideology of liberal capitalist democracy. It had now become clear from the struggles in many countries that the

[26] *Towards a Theology of Contemporary Ecumenism*, Madras, Christian Literature Society, 1978, p.261.
[27] *Ibid.*, pp.262-63.

capitalist world order was dying and a socialist world order was coming into being. Given the failure of capitalism to solve the problem of world economic injustice and poverty, it was only right and logical for the churches to see the moral superiority of the socialist interpretation of history and the particular historical task of liberation which it offers to us today. "Scientific socialism" provides the true approach to this moment in history. It enables the churches to see that "the liberal modernization project, as incorporated in the liberal democratic state built on the base of free enterprise capitalism, seems to have run its course and proven unable to respond to the needs of humanity at the present stage of human development".[28] By contrast the historical project of liberation "points to a society which can be described as socialist in the organization of its economy, democratic in terms of the political participation of the people, and open in the sense of ensuring the conditions for personal realization, cultural freedom and opportunity, and the mechanisms for self correction".[29] Thus, Míguez Bonino, a distinguished Protestant theologian from Argentina, and a former president of the World Council of Churches, affirms the superiority of the liberation socialist perspective as a replacement for the older liberal capitalist approach. The liberation alternative is, in his view, clearly valid for all the developing countries. It is in fact a "global project":

> The people's movements in Asia, the liberation struggles in Africa, and the different political alternatives being pursued in Latin America today represent a wide variety of choices but all can be recognized as — and in many cases they recognize themselves to be — a "family of options" representative of a specific historical project.[30]

This understanding of liberation theology is to be found in several WCC documents. It was expressed most vividly in the report, "Towards a Church in Solidarity with the Poor", submitted by the Commission for the Churches' Participation in Development to the WCC Central Committee in 1980, and approved for distribution and study in the churches.[31]

By hindsight we now know that various developments in the period 1975-80 had begun to weaken liberation theology's diagnosis of the world political-economic situation and its remedies for worldwide social injustice. I suggest four reasons why liberation ecumenism is now questioned:

1. The political and economic difficulties of countries which espoused "scientific socialism" have undermined the central thesis of liberation ecumenism: that the socialist system is superior to all other economic systems. This is true especially in Eastern Europe, but it is also true of the countries of Africa and Asia and Latin America that have experimented with the socialist model. The debacle in Cambodia, the end of the Maoist cultural revolution in 1976 in China and the steady movement away from socialist theory or practice since then; the development of joint ventures

[28] José Míguez Bonino, *Towards Christian Political Ethics*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1983, p.76.
[29] *Ibid.*, pp.76-77.
[30] *Ibid.*, p.78.
[31] CCPD, WCC, February 1980. The report affirms: "World resources and economic growth appear to be controlled by a combination of social, economic, political and cultural mechanisms which are in turn manipulated by a few powerful sectors of society for their own profit.... It was love of economic gain and profit that drove powerful nations armed with technology to subdue militarily other nations and people rich in resources and culture. Although that period is now over, a similar process is in operation today; the lust for economic gain continues to find expression through economic and political powers which oppress the weak. The accumulation of wealth is structured into the capitalist system, while the agents and structures most evident in its global functioning include the transnational corporations and neo-colonialism" (p.5).

with capitalist transnational companies in practically all socialist nations — all these developments suggest that some very fundamental changes have taken place in relations between socialist and capitalist countries which must affect our understanding of how the world will achieve economic growth and justly distribute its fruits. Clearly there has been a decline in the prestige of both the ideology and the praxis of socialist societies. One Western (socialist) scholar has addressed this problem in stringent terms:

> The representative democracies of advanced capitalism are highly imperfect state forms, but as a political order they are all too clearly still superior to anything yet fashioned to compete with them. Much of the residual viability of capitalist societies in the face of recession depends directly upon this plain and effectively publicized superiority. But it is above all the incoherence of modern socialist economies which threatens the political prospects of socialism in wealthy capitalist countries. The main point on which this essay insists is the political frivolity of any socialist politics which fails to face and surmount this challenge. The grounds for taking this grim view are provided by the increasingly clearly understood failures of socialist economic planning when put into practice.... Unless socialists can solve intellectually the problems which this body of (critical) work has identified, their future political activities are overwhelmingly likely to be either futile or inadvertently destructive.[32]

Events since 1984 when the above was written have only tended to reinforce this judgment. There is little evidence that the theorists of liberation ecumenism have faced up to this challenge.

2. Liberation ecumenism has difficulty coping with the challenge of the modern scientific-technological world-view. The liberation socialist view of science and technology is as anachronistic as the capitalist-technocratic approach. The assumption is that a just and liberated society will always know how to use modern science and technology responsibly. But liberation thinking itself has been wedded to the modern scientific-technological world-view of unlimited domination of nature. Within the ecumenical movement liberation theologians have tended to downplay the importance of the questions posed by modern science and technology. Insofar as they have addressed these questions it has been mainly to demand that the industrially developing countries receive a just share of world scientific and technological power. The question of the future of societies dominated by such power has, for understandable reasons, been put aside in situations where social justice appears to be the primary issue. But in the larger ecumenical discussion, the science, technology, faith issue has become steadily more urgent.

3. It is now clear that liberation theology has given insufficient attention to the problem of political freedom and justice. Liberation thinkers have generally assumed rather than defined a just political system: it was assumed that a true peoples' economy would naturally produce an open and democratic society. Today there is a widespread conviction that socialist theory has often failed to insist on a democratic order as one of the conditions of socialism. While liberation theologians emphasize their concern for "participation of the people", they give little attention to the particular problems that need to be addressed if human rights are to be protected in the midst of the kind of revolutionary social change which a "liberation social project" would entail. This gives the impression that liberation theology is naive about politics or accepts the need for a limited dictatorship of "the people".

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[32] John Dunn, *The Politics of Socialism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p.xvii.

4. Liberation ecumenism fosters liberal optimism (utopianism). Historically, as we have seen, the ecumenical movement has rejected utopian tendencies in Christian and secular social thought. The optimism of liberation theology about the possibilities of realizing social justice within history has reopened that debate. The fact that liberation theology has not submitted itself to thorough ecumenical scrutiny on this point is not in its favour. Here the "action-reflection" approach becomes a sign of weakness rather than strength. It suggests that an action commitment precedes reflection; that the reflection (in the form of conceptual and theological understanding) can never determine the action but can only strengthen or defend what is already decided. This forecloses the possibility of openness to the historical discipline of ecumenical scrutiny and creates doubts about whether liberation ecumenism is really ecumenical in spirit. It is prophetic but in the sectarian sense of that word; a movement that is not the united or uniting Christian force that it aspires to be.

Concluding observations

This review suggests the paradox of ecumenical work in this field. On the one hand there are the substantial achievements of the past: the statements and formulations of Christian social responsibility which have continuing relevance. It is impossible to address issues of Christian social ethics today without reference to these previous formulations, debates, studies and actions.

On the other hand there is the constant change in Christian social thought, reminders of the tentative nature of the enterprise, the awareness of discontinuity, and the impossibility of literally applying past theories and findings to the contemporary political and social situation. The modern stress on the contextual approach in social ethics has perhaps accentuated this sense of discontinuity, emphasizing the need to adjust or substantially revise previous ethical thought and action in relation to the new social issues and realities.

Yet today, at the close of the latest period, as with all previous periods, there is a reluctance to recognize that the social context has changed, that the theories and ideas which had previously guided ecumenical social thought and action might need to be reviewed. Such lags in ethical thought have delayed the process of renewal and reconstruction necessary for making ecumenical social thought responsive and relevant to the new context. The churches continue to agree on "service" to the world: aid to refugees, work for human rights, the struggle against racism, modest charitable programmes of material aid to the poor and oppressed, support for the anti-apartheid campaign in South Africa and for women's rights in church and society, concern about the impact of modern science and technology on the human and the natural environment. But there is no common theological or ethical understanding regarding ecumenical witness in political and economic life, no common vision or conceptual agreement to guide a united Christian witness and action for political and economic justice. This situation seems on all sides unsatisfactory but is likely to continue unless there is new work in three critical areas.

1. *Ecumenical study and dialogue on the different theological and ethical approaches to political and social issues.* The ecumenical movement seems more deeply divided and polarized than ever before about the theological-ethical basis of ecumenical social thought and action. After a long period in which the Oxford approach dominated, there was in the 1970s a return to a Stockholm-type ethic of love-

idealism and activism, though defended this time with new theological-ethical arguments. This ethical approach is now widely contested. Can the ecumenical movement resolve the present differences, or must we conclude that for the present ecumenism can do little more than reveal "the divisions that wrack the churches"? We seem to face again the kind of impasse which developed between Stockholm and Oxford. This time however the process of dialogue and study necessary to resolve the differences is certain to be more difficult and complicated. Not only are there more member churches representing very different cultural and social situations. There are new theological issues to be considered, e.g. relating to the rights of women in church and society, or to the different Christian evaluations of the modern scientific and technological world-view. These and other contemporary concerns have yet to be integrated into a general theory or understanding of social responsibility which would find broad support in the churches. In addition churches in many countries today are upset and divided by such theological movements as neo-pietism, fundamentalism, and aggressive forms of Christian "new rightism" and "new leftism". Such developments will need to be evaluated in any contemporary statement of the Christian responsibility for social justice. Is the ecumenical movement prepared today for this work of review and of rethinking the theological and ethical basis of its witness in contemporary political and economic life? The answer is far from clear. It was this kind of problem that provoked the Vancouver Assembly (1983) to recommend that the WCC undertake a coordinated effort to help its programmes grow "towards a vital and coherent theology". The results, five years later, suggest that slight progress has been made in finding a new theological-ethical understanding.

2. *The need to review ecumenical understanding of the function of the church in society, including the methods used to determine its social policies.* As this survey has shown, there is considerable controversy today about the ways in which the churches and the different segments of the ecumenical movement determine their policies on particular social problems and express them in action. For example, there continues to be substantial disagreement on the role of the laity, of "experts" in the social or political or scientific fields, or of the various groups of the oppressed, in the churches. The decision-making bodies of the World Council of Churches — its officers, Executive and Central Committees, and Assemblies — remain very largely the domain of theologians, clergy and ecclesiastical officials. The debate about the role of lay persons, and the representation of different lay interests, is unresolved. Ecumenical social thinking has in the past sometimes been accused of being intellectual and elitist; more recently it has been charged with snubbing the academic expert whether in theology or in the social or natural sciences.[33] Underlying all these ecclesiological and methodological problems are ecumenical questions of another order. Some find in the contemporary ecumenical style of pronouncements and statements on social issues a "lingering Christendom mentality", traceable back to the 1925 Stockholm conference statement, that "the world is too strong for a divided Church". One experienced American ecumenist comments on this point:

[33] See Krister Stendahl, "The Ecumene and the Academe", in *Faith and Faithfulness: Essays in Honour of Philip Potter*, Geneva, WCC, 1984.

> It apparently did not occur to the Christians at Stockholm that "the world" might be "too strong" for even a united church. The minority status of Christians in such populous areas of the world as China, India and the Middle East is not mentioned. We could ask, of course, whether in the United States the churches can cope with the major political and economic centers of power. But suppose a united church could do that. How does that relate to the power centers of Palestinian-Israeli conflict or the Persian Gulf or Moscow or Beijing or New Delhi. I do not want to give excuses to quiescent Christians ... But I can't help noticing the implicit triumphalism in the Stockholm pattern of thought and wondering. What do we substitute for that today?[34]

This suggests the need to extend the ecumenical dialogue with other living faiths, ideologies and cultures to include divisive political and economic issues and possible grounds for cooperative action towards international peace and justice.

3. *The need to expand and deepen ecumenical analysis of political and social issues.* Christian action depends on analysis and interpretation of the world social situation. This often determines the churches' point of entry into political life. In the post-war period, on the strength of its analyses, the ecumenical movement rejected the ideologies of laissez-faire capitalism and totalitarian communism and proposed the criterion of the responsible society. Later this was enlarged to encourage support for the new and independent nations of the third world and for a cooperative world commonwealth of nations, guided by the United Nations. By 1968 this vision seemed to require more radical action to defeat the entrenched powers of oppression and privilege. The ecumenical movement responded with action programmes in support of liberation from racial, economic and political injustice, emphasizing empowerment of the people and a strong critique of the capitalist economic system. Today, more than fifteen years later, there are questions and doubts about the analysis underlying some of these policies and programmes. The world, including the third world, has changed in new and unexpected ways since 1969. The assumption that the modern capitalist system was in decline or that a socialist system would automatically overcome poverty is now questioned. The role of the state in achieving economic justice is less clear than it seemed previously. There is also uncertainty about the role of science and technology in determining the future of society. We are therefore obliged to make a new analysis of the world political and economic situation from the ecumenical perspective and examine openly the ideological and cultural differences within the ecumenical movement. This will be a formidable undertaking, not unlike that which faced the World Council in 1962, when it launched the "time of review".

Contemporary and future ecumenical work in these three critical areas can find much to build on from the past. The ideas and findings of Stockholm (1925), Oxford (1937), Amsterdam (1948), Evanston (1954), Cottesloe (1960), Geneva (1966), Uppsala (1968), Notting Hill (1969), Canterbury (1969), Montreux (1970), Boston (1979) and Sheffield (1981) (to name only some of the more significant ecumenical encounters and conferences on social issues) are rich in experience and information. As a guide to the future, these meetings also reveal that the search today for "the new, creative solutions" to social justice, freedom and order, which participation in the ecumenical movement obligates the churches to discover, will involve them in a large new effort of dialogue, enquiry, and common understanding where their own resourcefulness, insight, and faithfulness will be tested as much as it was in the past.

[34] Comment by Roger Shinn, in a letter of 1 January 1988, on an earlier draft of this paper.

The Prophetic Mission of Orthodoxy

A Witness to Love in Service

George Lemopoulos

The third Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference which met in 1986 was in many ways a milestone in the recent history of Orthodoxy. Among the documents issued by the conference is one entitled "The Contribution of the Orthodox Church to the Realization of Peace, Justice, Freedom, Fraternity and Love among People and to the Suppression of Racial and other Discriminations".

The following reflections are based on this document. Their aim is to assess certain sections of the text as these refer to the "prophetic role of the Orthodox Church". That phrase is from the text — a text about which an Orthodox theologian made the following remark: "Upon reading the text itself, one is dazzled. It is, without doubt, the most profound, and finally the most important, of all those elaborated by the Conference. I'll say straight out: it took a lot of courage, a lot of strength of purpose for the bishops from the Eastern bloc countries to collaborate in the writing of these pages and to sign them. Here, the Spirit has passed by."[1]

If it is true that this document does not give concrete examples of involvement, it is nevertheless true that almost every part of it is inspired by local situations and realities, and it reflects the profound existential significance of what people believe and do.

For example, what is said about the diaconal mission as a response to God's will and as a mission in Christ's way is, in fact, a recommendation to all local communities; what is stated on the hunger problem is mainly related to Ethiopia, where some Orthodox churches (Cyprus, Greece, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America) have actively been involved; what is proposed for the rights of minorities has in mind the situation in Middle East and, particularly, in Lebanon; what is developed in the direction of a growing cooperation with believers of other faiths concerns the Ancient Patriarchates, living in the midst of a Muslim world; what is described as an Orthodox contribution to peace and justice is part of the ongoing programme by the Orthodox Church of Russia; finally, what is stated on racial discriminations has

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[1] Olivier Clément, "La 3ème conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire" (interview), in *SOP* No. 117, April 1987, p.21.

probably a particular meaning for the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa that discovers more and more the real dimensions of its flock when expressing its will to give witness in the field.

Yet, it is difficult to suggest concrete criteria or examples of collaboration for these situations. The Orthodox Church has always been aware that there are many situations where the word is easy but the deed is costly or the deed is easy but the word extremely costly. In such situations what is important is not to forget that the church's mission is not always a success story but a continuous sacrifice in order to conquer "death by death", a long way passing through the sorrow of the cross in order to lead towards a life of joy. Finally, what is important in every situation is to be conscious that the past, the present and the future of our mission is written by the Holy Spirit, for the church itself is the fulfilment of the promise: "You shall be my witness, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you" (Acts 1:8).

Theology of human community

> Man, as the apex and recapitulation of divine creation and as being in the image and likeness of his Creator, has been, for the Orthodox Church, the overall goal of its mission in the world and in the history of salvation. The re-establishing of man in the original grandeur and beauty of being "in the image and likeness" is considered, by the Orthodox Church, as the very essence of its mission. Even the internal, purely theological, disputes which led to the formulation of the trinitarian, Christological and ecclesiological doctrines of Christianity, aimed, in the last analysis, at preserving the authenticity and plenitude of Christian teaching about man and his salvation.[2]

From the beginning the human person is presented as the overall goal of the *church's mission*. Certainly, this is not a passage from God to humankind, or from theology to anthropology. It is rather an evangelistic witness, first, to the fact that every person is created in the image and in the likeness of God and, second, that "the one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God for us and for our salvation was incarnate". This theological affirmation is applied in the life of the church by continually defending in the world the value and uniqueness of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God, but ever called to repentance, to a return to God and to the true self.

Both dimensions of the church's mission have as their starting-point the gift of adoption in Christ. The Son of God became a human person, and as human person became a model of obedience to his Father, an obedience which caused him to suffer death on the cross (Phil. 2:8). Through the cross, Christ brought about peace between us and the Father, and gave to all the possibility of becoming "children of God" (John 1:12), while he himself became "the pioneer of our salvation" (Heb. 2:10-11). Through the cross, each person was not only reconciled to God, but also to the whole of humanity, for the whole of humankind was reunited on the cross "in a new man", with Christ as its head (Eph. 2:14-18).

Both dimensions of the church's mission have as their lever the grace of the Holy Spirit. The grace of Christ is offered to everybody as a gift of the Holy Spirit, provided each person is also prepared to work towards his or her salvation, wrought by God in

[2] "The Contribution of the Orthodox Church to the Realization of Peace, Justice, Freedom, Fraternity and Love Among People and to the Suppression of Racial and Other Discriminations", par. A,2.

Christ (Eph. 6:18; Rom. 8:26-28). The Holy Spirit enables every person to participate in the task of renewal carried out once and for all by Christ (Tit. 3:4-6). The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Son of God, cries out in the hearts of each person "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6), thereby re-establishing their forgotten bond with God and the rest of humankind.

For this reason, Christians do not make up any body, but the church, "the body of Christ", who was crucified, who rose from the dead and who — as he promised — remains for ever with those who believe in him "to the end of time" (Matt. 28:20). It is, indeed, the dynamic, active and real presence of Christ in the bosom of the church which makes it the "body of Christ" and the kingdom of God. At the same time, it makes for her own dynamic and active presence in the world.

This dynamism flows from the Trinitarian doctrine: the Father sends the Son in the Holy Spirit into the world. Again, the Son sends his disciples into the world. The "sending" of mission, related to Pentecost, is essentially the sending of the Spirit (John 14:26), who manifests the life of God as communion (1 Cor. 13:13). Thus, the corollary of the Trinitarian doctrine is the ideal of harmonious fulfilment (koinonia) it implies, not only for human society as a whole, but also for each person separately. In the communion of the divine persons, there is no other motive than unselfish love, and this love is exemplary for the life of the church's members.

On this point, a further thinking on how these principles penetrate today the concrete diaconal efforts of the Orthodox Church would be important. The church, as koinonia, consisted of "men, women and children, different in sex and appearance, in nationality and language, in their life and age and ideas, arts and manners, customs and professions".[3] It has to encourage and develop the true nature and vocation of each one of these persons, their unique place in its overall missionary ministry. On the other hand, the Orthodox Church has probably to affirm strongly that the object of its mission is not only the human person alone, in an artificially religious isolation from the world, but also the world, the whole cosmos, as an entity of which each human person is a part.

Faith and diakonia

> God's will today, which involves the salvation of man here and now, obliges us to serve man, helping him to face his particular problems. Faith in Christ without a diaconal mission loses its meaning. To be Christian means to copy Christ and to be ready to serve him in the person of the weak, the hungry, the downtrodden and, in general, the person of those in need. All other efforts to see Christ as a real presence, without coming into contact with the needy, is nothing more than pure theory.[4]

Obedience to the will of God outlines for each Christian the framework of one's "diaconal mission", as well as that of the church in the world. For when one becomes aware of the richness of God's love and grace, when one understands the greatness of Christ's sacrifice, and particularly upon becoming an active member of his body, one realizes that one cannot remain indifferent to one's neighbour, one cannot feel hatred and enmity towards him or her.

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[3] Maximus the Confessor, MPG 91, 665.
[4] "The Contribution...", *op. cit.*, par. G,4.

The glorification of God naturally turns into a mission of service, a "diaconal mission". So one enters into an existential relationship with Christ — a relationship based on the living of the mystery of salvation, a mystery which should permeate all one's life in the world. In other words, as the response to the call is a recognition of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ, it is expressed mainly as a thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) in the sacramental life. For the Orthodox Church the sacramental experience leads to the understanding that the church is not a self-centred community but an open, serving community. Fr Schmemann summed up this fact as follows: "There exists and always has existed a different perspective, a different approach for the sacrament and this approach may be of crucial importance, precisely for the whole burning issue of mission, of our witness to Christ in the world. For the basic question is: What have we seen, touched with our hands? Of what have we partaken, been made communicants? Where do we call men? What can we offer them?"[5]

For this reason, worship does not only imply participating in the church's sacraments and recognizing God's goodness towards us, but also reconciliation with one's neighbour, helping one's neighbour. This is how Christians lived in the early centuries. Justin Martyr, writing to Rome in about 150 A.D., gives a detailed account of the strength of the bond between the sacrament ("mystery") of the word, the sacrament of the altar ("the Table") and the sacrament of the "brother": "The day called Sun-day an assembly is held in one place and the records of the apostles or writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows. Then the president in a discourse admonishes and exhorts (us) to imitate these good things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers: and bread and wine and water are brought up, and the president likewise offers prayers and thanksgivings, and the people assent, saying the Amen; and there is a distribution, and everyone participates in (the elements) over which thanks have been given; and they are sent through the deacons to those who are not present. And the wealthy who so desire give what they wish, as each chooses; and what is collected is deposited with the president. He helps orphans and widows, and those who through sickness or any other cause are in need, and those in prison, and strangers sojourning among us; in a word, he takes care of all those who are in need."[6]

Here we discover the chief method of evangelistic work, which is almost the same as that of the early church. For those who have acknowledged the love of God for themselves, evangelistic witness is the sharing of love. In this sense, "diaconal mission" is not an optional action, duty or moral stance in relation to the needy, additional to our community in Christ, but an indispensable expression of that community, which has its source in the eucharistic and liturgical life of the church. This is the "liturgy after the liturgy" and it is in this sense that it is described as a judgment upon our history (Matt. 25:31-46).

For this very reason, the document we are examining stresses that the Orthodox Church today has a prophetic role in the modern world. It must radiate the joy of worship, especially eucharistic worship, and use it as a yardstick to measure the social witness of Christians in the world. In this context, the need for Christian unity — and world unity — becomes obvious. As the text says:

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[5] *The World as Sacrament*, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974, p.23.
[6] *First Apology*, 67, 3-7.

> A wide horizon opens up here before the Orthodox churches, as they can propose to a divided world the essential element of their ecclesiological and social teaching: the ideal of liturgical and, in particular, eucharistic communion.[7]

Each local Orthodox church should emphasize the real witnessing vocation of each eucharistic community in a concrete place, i.e. the parish. This same fact could lead to the revitalization of the witness of each local Orthodox church within new missionary situations (pluralistic societies, diaspora, socialist context, context of developing churches) by discovering new forms of evangelization and witness. Finally, the Orthodox presence on all six continents would be an excellent starting point to deepen, on a very large scale, questions like the relationship of church and society, church and culture, faith and secularization, etc.

God's love: the principle of Christian social witness

> A witness to love means that the Orthodox Churches can intervene in situations judged contrary to the Gospel and to their tradition. Here the imperative is the prophetic mission of Orthodoxy, its duty to "give an account of the hope that is in us" in every case involving the progress of peace, of freedom, of justice and of brotherhood, as well as respect for the human person as being in the image of God. During the carrying out of this prophetic mission, the Orthodox churches have an obligation to watch over the peace of mind of their flock, which they are bound to lead on the path of the Gospel. We believe that, to do so, it is love that will galvanize the will of the Orthodox Churches so that, together with their brethren, the other Christian churches and confessions, and also with other people, they may today bear their witness — a witness to faith and hope — in a world which, perhaps more than at any other time, needs just that.[8]

The church's yardstick for its witness and presence in the world is the gospel of Christ. The gospel is the foundation not only of liturgy and sacrament, theology and prayer, church and tradition, but of all Christian existence. The strength and the possibilities of the church in the confrontation with the world spring from the gospel: its nature, its blessings, its demands and its promises. For this reason, the church intervenes in all cases judged contrary to the spirit of the joyful message of salvation. But, like the nature of its mission, such an intervention does not take the form of a barren polemical criticism. It is a "witness to love" in the world.

The witness of the church is made even more prophetic and more persuasive, when all Christians work together to preach with words and deeds the lordship of the God of love in the history of humankind and the sacredness of the human person. Here we have an interesting point. Mission and unity are two allied and interlocking forms of the same principle — love.

This is why the gospel message leads the church to widen the horizon of its social action beyond its geographical and confessional borders. Helping those who need help and those who face serious problems in their lives is an essential aspect of diakonia. A diakonia which, passing beyond self-interest and ideological prejudice, aims at the glory of God.

> It is in this manner that one should understand the Church's immense responsibility for combating hunger and the extreme poverty which today relentlessly pursue — and it is quite

[7] "The Contribution...", *op. cit.*, par. G,1.
[8] *Ibid.*, par. H,1.

unacceptable — whole populations, especially in the third world. Such a terrifying phenomenon in our day and age — when the economically advanced countries live in wealth and wastefulness, squandering money on armaments — reveals a serious identity crisis, for two particular reasons:

a) because hunger not only threatens the divine gift of life of whole nations in developing countries, but also annihilates the greatness and sacredness of the human person;
b) because the economically advanced countries, through an unjust and often criminal distribution and management of material goods, not only insult the image of God in every human person, but God himself, since God clearly identifies himself with the hungry and the needy, saying: "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40).[9]

The text goes even further. Always basing itself on the gospel word, it proclaims the equality of all human beings (Acts 17:26; Gal. 2:28) and condemns an inhuman attitude towards one's fellow human person (Mark 25:41-61; James 2:15-16). It does not beat about the bush in speaking of racial discrimination. And it does not stop at racial discrimination. It goes on to uphold the rights of all minorities, clearly showing how to put into practice the teaching of the church. Just as every person has his or her own unique role to play in church and society, so every community has the right to maintain its difference within the unity of a nation or of a country. In the first instance, the document proposes a Christological consideration, while in the second it turns to a Trinitarian one.

Orthodoxy utterly condemns the inhuman system of racial discrimination and the sacrilegious affirmation that it is in harmony with Christian ideals. To the question "And who is my neighbour?", Christ replied with the parable of the Good Samaritan. Thus he taught us to abolish every dividing wall of hate and prejudice. Orthodoxy confesses that every person, without consideration of his colour, creed, race, tongue, bears within him the image of God and is our brother or sister, an equal member of the human family.

A minority, be it religious or racial, should be respected for what it is. A man's freedom is linked to the freedom of the community to which he belongs. Every community should be free to develop its talents. Pluralism should be a rule in the life of every country. The unity of a nation, a country or a state should be understood as encompassing the right for human communities to be different.[10]

The church announces the joyful message; it combats sin and condemns injustice; it suffers with all people deprived of the blessings of peace and justice; it faces up to the serious problem of freedom of conscience, and to the spiritual emptiness which human beings vainly try to fill through consumerism; it stands by those who are marginalized; it consoles widows and orphans. The church has a particular mission within the world — *a mission in Christ's way* — because

none of the socio-political ideologies, neither human rationalism nor devotion to one's own country, can save democracy, social justice and the so-called human rights. Human egocentrism is very narrow to contain the *other*, particularly the *enemy*, and to love him or her as oneself. For this reason, the human development and intellect are satisfied with the *change* of the old, the reversal of the status quo. For the church such an attitude is an

[9] *Ibid.*, par. G,2.
[10] *Ibid.*, par. F,3 and 4.

> unforgivable minimalism. In the church the other and the enemy not only are received but also forgiven and included after their metanoia. The result is not a simple change but a true *reconciliation* and a *renewal*, meaning radical transformation of the situation and not any superficial and hypocritical *variation* or *change*.[11]

However, more reflection is needed in order to clarify the cosmic and historical dimension of the church's mission that such an involvement entails. It would be of great importance to underline that the task of the church is not to preserve its religious life but to consider society and culture as real objects of its mission. In other words, the proclamation of the gospel cannot be an informative preaching as sacramental life cannot stay at the level of individual or congregational experience. They have to become the basic elements of the vocation of mediating God's love i.e. to induce in the whole world the process of transfiguration.

Witness among people of living faiths

> The local Orthodox Churches, in close collaboration with all the peace-loving adherents of other world religions, consider it their duty to work for peace on earth and the maintenance of brotherly relations between people. The Orthodox Churches are called to contribute to inter-religious concord and cooperation, aimed at removing fanaticism of all kinds. They are thus called to work for the reconciliation of all peoples and the preservation of the blessings of freedom and peace in the world for all men today, irrespective of race or creed. It is understood that this collaboration excludes both syncretism and the effort of any given religion to impose itself on others.[12]

In these few lines, there is added to the church's mission the call to mutual comprehension and cooperation with other religious believers. A comprehension excluding *a priori* all forms of syncretism and a cooperation aiming at wiping out every trace of fanaticism. The aim of the argument is, again, the defence of the supernatural dimension of humankind as the image of God. This is, indeed, the witness of the church, flowing from the encounter with the word of God incarnate.

In spite of occasional efforts to hold unofficial bilateral conversations with representatives of other religions, the Orthodox Church seems to avoid, for the time being, broaching the subject of an official theological dialogue between Christianity and other religions. It speaks only of a meeting and collaboration with people whose faith in God and struggle against evil in the human being and in the world is, directly or indirectly, known.

The question is thus posed from the historical and not the theological viewpoint. The undivided church embarked on dialogue with the Jews, the Gentiles and the doctors of Greek philosophy combined with theology. At the root of the dialogue was always the deep bond existing between God's revelation and the human being's attitude to that revelation. For the church fathers: "The Logos put our world in order through the Holy Spirit and more particularly man, this microcosm",[13] and even many of the pagan philosophers "have caught a glimpse of the Holy Spirit".[14] So a

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[11] Archbishop Stylianos of Australia, "The Myths of Both Right and Left", in *To Vima*, 17 July 1987, p.8 (*in Greek*).
[12] "The Contribution...", *op. cit.*, par. A,5.
[13] Clement of Alexandria, *Protreptikos*, 1, 5.
[14] Gregory Nazianzen, *Ov.*, 31, 5.

constructive inter-religious conversation would not be impossible, given that, for the church fathers, "there is but one and the same God who, from the very beginning to the end and by various dispensations, comes to the rescue of humankind".[15]

However, during the course of history, the church noticed a tendency of religions to turn into ideologies. This became an impediment to dialogue. For ideologizing tends to bring about idolizing, or a moving away from the search for eternal truth.

That is why, in the early stages of dialogue, the Orthodox Church proposes collaboration with the adherents of other creeds and joint service of humankind, regardless of race or belief. It is hoped thereby to create communities blessed with freedom, peace and mutual respect. It could also give Christians the opportunity to prove the sincerity of the religious convictions of other people and to bypass the obstacles caused by historical events.

Sanctifying and transforming the world

The strength the church draws from the exercise of its mission in the world leads it to see the world from an angle we could call that of "active eschatology". Christ's disciples had the privilege of knowing the mysteries of God's kingdom and of being led by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 13:13; Mark 4:11; John 14:17). They thus became the "little flock" who would inherit the kingdom (Luke 12:32). Therefore, within the church and, more especially, within the eucharistic experience of the faithful, the eschatological reality is present. But this eschatological reality calls for a certain historical preparation. The disciples were told to become "the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13), "the light of the world" and "a city set on a hill" (Matt. 5:14). Thus, the church is placed in the very centre of history, sanctifying and transforming the world, by being a new creation, creating a new mode of life. At the same time it is placed at the end of history as a sign of the kingdom, judging the world (1 Cor. 5-6) in the light of the eschatological realities of which the eucharist is a manifestation.[16] This consideration gives us the strength to keep on praying and to act in the world with the prospect of changing the world and resurrecting the human person in Christ.

> God, with a strong hand, is shaping the course of history, while Christians live even now in the Church the eschatological reality of the Kingdom of God, looking forward to a new earth and a new heaven. For this reason, even though they are anxious about the extent of evil in the world and struggle to limit it, they do not give way to despair, for they view all things from the standpoint of eternity, looking forward to the resurrection of the dead and life of the age to come.[17]

The document ends with a eucharistic and eschatological vision of things to come, a "creative spirituality": the more the church participates in making known the fruits of the resurrection and the mystery of love within the Holy Trinity, the more it should struggle within history against all forms of death and division. The text runs thus:

> We Orthodox Christians, having grasped the meaning of salvation, feel it our duty to struggle for the relief of sickness, unhappiness and anguish. Enjoying peace, we cannot remain indifferent to its absence from modern society. Having benefited from divine justice, we struggle for more justice in the world and for the abolition of all oppression.

[15] Irenaeus, *Adv. Haeres*, III, 12.13.
[16] Cf. *Didache*, 10.
[17] "The Contribution...", *op. cit.*, par. E,3.

Experiencing every day divine clemency, we fight against every form of fanaticism and intolerance between people and peoples. Continually proclaiming the incarnation of God and the divinization of man, we defend human rights for all men and all nations. Enjoying the divine gift of freedom thanks to the redeeming work of Christ, we are able to announce more completely its universal value for every person and every people. Nourished by the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, we experience the need to share the gifts of God with our brethren; we feel more keenly what is meant by hunger and want and struggle to overcome them. Looking forward to a new earth and a new heaven, where absolute justice will reign, we struggle here and now (*hic et nunc*) for the rebirth and regeneration of man and society.[18]

[18] "The Contribution...", *op. cit.*, par. H,2.

An Oikoumene of Women?

Reinhild Traitler

From emancipation to liberation

When I was appointed to the staff of the WCC in Geneva in 1969, I was fortunate enough to find myself for a number of years a close colleague of Madeleine Barot. Madeleine was a woman I admired and respected — and of whom I stood a little in awe. Having herself followed the demanding path of emancipation, she in turn demanded a great deal of her sisters. "Of course we need women, but they've got to be good," she often used to say, and at the time I accepted it without much argument. For we women still had to prove ourselves and to do that we had to work with particular dedication and commitment. Only slowly did it dawn on me that all this had simply earned us the doubtful privilege of being allowed to "do a man's job" among the men of the ecumenical movement.

Outside factors influenced me here. One important factor for me was the double work load of being a mother in an extremely demanding job. Another was a letter written to all the WCC's senior staff by a young secretary in 1973: "The World Council of Churches from a grade 2 desk." It was an angry letter written by an angry young woman, describing her own powerlessness in a working world shaped and dominated by men. I met with a group of secretaries to talk about this letter and was nonplussed to find that for these women I was "a man", part of the power structure which to them was synonymous with oppression and non-participation. In a man's world, where I myself had over and over again had a sense of alienation, I had status. I was like a man.

It was then I realized that more was involved than emancipation in the sense of equal rights. I myself had never had to fight for the right to occupy as good a position as possible in a world (and a church) shaped, ruled and run by men — others had done that before me. Now I was faced with the much more difficult task of liberating myself, for myself, as a woman — a much more complicated undertaking because we have thoroughly assimilated the image of woman as seen by men. It has become part of our identity and the process of relinquishing it is a painful one. In addition, I found myself in a deep dilemma: in my work in the Commission on the Churches'

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Participation in Development (CCPD) the problems of women's liberation simply did not count; we were dealing with the immense suffering of the poor masses of the third world and the firmly entrenched and powerful structures of oppression which shaped international relations. We were analyzing facts, supporting efforts for self-help, helping solidarity groups to get organized, lobbying in international agencies... How could I possibly go bursting into the middle of all this with the women's liberation movement? My colleagues convinced me that in view of the really demonic nature of the powers we were dealing with, that was really an emotional "belly-ache". Only later (and very gradually) did we all come to realize that the women among the poorest of the poor are still the poorest of all. The extent of suffering is always in inverse proportion to the measure of power and rights that one has. We gradually realized that in many third-world countries women have little power and fewer rights. We also understood that a new social system did not automatically change the role concepts which had grown up over much longer periods of time. In many national liberation movements women were in the front line, in the literal sense of the word. In the new society a new role was then simply added to their traditional role: they were now entitled not only to ensure reproduction but to participate in production, without there being any change in the men's traditional expectations of their wives.

During a visit to Cuba I realized that far-reaching cultural change cannot be brought about simply by changing the conditions of production although economic independence for women is an important step towards liberation.

Slowly, and partly thanks to the great projects of the WCC's Sub-unit on Women in Church and Society, it came home to us that this was more than an emotional "belly-ache". I was deeply involved in two of those projects. The conference on sexism in the seventies organized in Berlin in 1974 by Brigalia Bam (the then director of the Women's Desk) was an attempt to describe and analyze women's experiences of oppression. It clearly identified the structural conditions of oppression and unequivocally laid claim to the word liberation for women also. Women's newly awakened longing to be "their own person" went beyond the concerns of the historical women's emancipation movement in the North Atlantic countries. That had had so much to do in winning the legal basis of equality that there had been no chance to develop other aspects of which the germs were already present.

What I heard at the sexism conference was women asking questions about their image of themselves, about developing new relations between men and women, the demand for participation in all areas of personal, social and church life, the search for a different way of handling power — in short, the question of far-reaching cultural change.

The difficult road through the institutions

Admittedly, when we began to move hesitantly towards finding concrete answers to these questions, we soon realized the dilemma we were in: the material pressures of the man's world were so firmly anchored in our minds and hearts that we found it extremely difficult to contribute to that world in our own distinctive way as women, and we were so few and far between that we lacked the courage to do so. It was clear that there had to be more of us to give us more confidence to undertake more and so increase our confidence in ourselves. And we had to make the men understand the questions we had been discovering for ourselves since the point of it all was a new

quality of relations and community. This was the origin of the strategies and programmes of the seventies: efforts for proper representation, the building of a network of women's groups, work on language, and the major study on "The Community of Women and Men in the Church".

For a long time, and to the constant amusement of the men, our strength was taken up by the struggle to improve women's representation (which increased from eight to thirty percent between Uppsala and Vancouver). Because of the other important questions it threw up, I would like to single this out as an example of our slow progress through the institutions.

I was once asked by an outraged prince of the church: "Do you intend to end up with half of all the delegates?" Flabbergasted, I gasped: "Yes, indeed". The discussion about what was an appropriate quota for women was an interesting barometer of the degree of disarray engendered in church hierarchies. It reached a painful climax at the Central Committee meeting in Dresden in the summer of 1981. The recommendation that "50 percent of all membership elected to all sub-units and committees of the WCC be women" led to a long and heated debate which can be followed in the minutes of the meeting. Interestingly enough, the debate did not even relate to the recommendation itself (which had been immediately rejected) but to an amendment proposed by the young American delegate, Jan Love, that the Central Committee "affirms that this principle of equal participation between men and women be a goal towards which we move, starting with the composition of WCC decision-making and consultative bodies..." The debate, conducted largely by men, evoked a series of principles why the amendment should be rejected — some worthy, some not so worthy, but all concurring on one decisive point, namely, that the churches were not happy at this interference in the quotas of their delegations. In principle, some said, they were not against it, but it would set a precedent and all kinds of groups could come demanding the same. The Orthodox representatives, who largely controlled the course of the debate, were franker in their objections. They made it clear that for them the problem of women's participation could not be solved in terms of equal rights, which was a legalistic concept. A theological and ecclesiological problem was involved, requiring further detailed study. To my way of thinking, the debate reflected a great sense of helplessness in face of the problems mooted here. It spoke of fear of a new departure with consequences that might slip beyond the men's control. The amendment did no more than propose recognition of a principle, in no sense implying legal obligations. But it was an explosive principle, as our Orthodox brothers had rightly sensed. It was during this debate that I first realized that the growing involvement of women would bring about a change in the ecumenical movement itself. It would bring a shift in both the style of the movement and the content of the issues dealt with. In Dresden our Orthodox brothers feared, rightly, that a World Council strongly influenced by women would also in the end ask the Orthodox churches the questions which are not supposed to be asked "for the sake of unity": the ordination of women, for instance.

Eventually, as a result of our struggle over quotas, almost 30 percent of the delegates at the Assembly in Vancouver were women.

The women's presence made itself strongly felt and, perhaps for the first time, we had the makings of a different way to approach the Assembly — an approach that started with actual human experiences, relating the issues back to the existential problems of men, women and children, seeing and depicting life as a whole, trying to

keep thought and emotions, action and prayer together, talking, singing, having fun and fellowship. The fact that the preparatory committee had been chaired by a committed woman was reflected in the whole undertaking. The women were a natural part of the whole and shared equally naturally in the running of the whole thing. For the first time we had some elements of the answer to how women would do things differently. Admittedly, when it came to the point, the important business sessions were again dominated by men — apparently, women are either uneasy or simply not interested in handling procedural rules and parliamentary regulations and speaking up where power and the exercise of power are at stake.

Self-discovery or social commitment?

Now that our efforts over quotas have been successful, I believe the time has come when in our community of women we must define the content of the issues we have to deal with in the future: in other words, we have to be precise about what we expect from liberation to be our own persons. Clearly, in this, our expectations are linked to our various experiences of oppression and there are great differences here.

Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel once tried to take seriously the form of oppression experienced by many middle-class Western women whose lives are lived at second hand. She wrote helpful words which could bring liberation from the domination of their lives by others and from the sense of worthlessness and dependence: "I am good, I am whole, I am beautiful." These words also contain theological considerations for a theology of the powerless, who are always held down, to whom some sins may be forgiven, but not that of getting above themselves. These are important phrases which are intended to give women the courage to say "I", to accept themselves, and the way they are, as willed by God, as good, whole and beautiful.

"Saying I" is an important step on the way to liberation for people who have hitherto been denied the right to a self. Yet I am certain that besides the "I" there must also be a "we". The step from "I" to "we" is not a chronological process, nor does it take the place of "I". We have to go on saying "I", but we have to learn to see ourselves as part of a community of many women. Bärbel von Wartenberg also wrote three helpful phrases: We are many, we have power, we need courage. This reflects the experience of the ecumenical fellowship of women: there are many women all over the world who have set out on the journey; they have set out from different forms of oppression, they see different tasks before them in order to build a life of greater humanity, peace and wholeness for themselves and their families and communities. They speak differently of their hopes.

As I write I think of some of these women — of Ritama in South India, living with her family in a slum, in solidarity with the people who have to live there, and organizing a self-help programme with the women. She is trying to show the poorest women of all, the untouchables, that they have a right to be in the world, that they are worth something, that they can stand up for themselves.

I think of Annathai in Sri Lanka helping the women workers in the tea plantations to press for better working conditions. Annathai herself is a Tamil, married to a Singhalese and trying to come to terms in her own family with the historical tensions which have plunged her country into such bitter conflict at present.

I think of Sithembiso in Zimbabwe, working with women in rural areas, dealing with seemingly prosaic problems — clean water, healthier eating habits, better

personal hygiene. But prosaic as they are, these are extremely important problems. If bad water is a danger to health, and women often have to walk many miles to obtain any water at all, that amounts to exploitation of valuable energies. Day in and day out Sithembiso practises what we might call "rural feminism", trying to meet women in their everyday problems and to encourage them to set out on the road. She it was, too, who at the WCC Sixth Assembly in Vancouver gave her address in the vast plenary hall holding her six-month old baby daughter in her arms, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. That was a most striking symbol, reminding us that life is a whole even amid the fragmented experiences of a major conference.

I think of Selena in Jamaica — the mother of two children and sole wage-earner. She was raped and robbed by an unemployed youth. She experienced the total powerlessness of what is for women the ultimate humiliation and nevertheless still found it in her to understand that man's situation and the rage and violence born of despair and hopelessness.

I think of the nuns in a convent in the Philippines who took to the streets alongside women workers protesting, despite a ban on demonstrations, against summary dismissals, an unfair wage policy and the often brutal intimidation used against any attempts at trade union organization by the women. They told me, smiling: "It is our form of devotion to be with those who are totally powerless."

But other nuns spring to mind, too. I can still see the women in a Romanian convent, young and old, bending over the costly embroideries which embellish the liturgical robes of the clergy, sitting at the looms weaving the complicated damask patterns. I remember being infuriated at the time by a remark made by the senior hierarch who was our host. With patronizing condescension he declared: "They enjoy doing it, these devout women of ours." Later I discovered the margin of freedom that exists in these communities — many of the women have studied theology and, even though they are excluded from the priesthood, there is much they can still do within the scope of the convents. They can do theological work, carry out pastoral activities and deal with all the practical aspects of running church life. They seek and maintain contacts with the outside; helped and encouraged by the WCC women's sub-unit, an Orthodox women's network is gradually emerging.

I think of the many women I have met in connection with the World Day of Prayer, women engaged in organizing a joint venture. How could I ever forget a group of women in Haiti who had set themselves the task of cooking one meal a day for the old beggar women in their town. These women, widows or elderly single women, society's rejects, are cared for every Saturday by the provost of the Roman Catholic cathedral, for which they proudly bear the name of "Cathedral beggars". But from Sunday to Friday they go round as guests of the different confessions in turn and the World Day of Prayer women cook meals for them — Sunday the Methodists, Monday the Baptists, and so on — week in, week out, year after year. This is no small affair, nor just a "charitable action" — it is a long-term, permanent commitment; an attempt by women to create a little social justice with the means and gifts at their disposal.

Lastly, I think of women in Europe and North America — like Christina in Sweden, who is a member of parliament and a minister because "we've got to get into politics to make politics different; we've got to use power to bring about a different distribution of power". I think of Loretta in the USA — a former Maryknoll sister, a doctor, singing nun, who married a Protestant minister and now they work together on a

church development education programme. After long years of working in the third world, Loretta said, it was more important to work at home now, even though it was more difficult and more depressing trying to rouse anything like a world consciousness among middle-class American church members.

Then I think of the women I am working with now. In one way or another we have all set out on a journey. Some have gone through the trauma of divorce after long years of marriage and are now systematically questioning the images they had of themselves and their life as a couple. Others have become involved in a movement, such as the peace movement. And they have discovered that making a break, setting out, starting afresh, searching for and step by step finding oneself is a liberating process but also a painful one. Some things we understand with our minds, but not yet with our hearts. They are finding that their journey brings them to limits which cannot be crossed simply by a new awareness. Our whole culture is much too patriarchal for that. Setting out and persevering with the journey means learning to understand the structural basis underlying individual experiences of oppression. Then sooner or later we have to face the difficult question: Do you want to be involved in building a new culture; can you put up with what it involves — estrangement from old familiar things, mockery, pressure from all sides? Can you go through all that on your own?

Women have begun their journey but they are on the move in different places, and I think it is important that we understand and respect this. In my experience, I have often found that women themselves refuse one another this solidarity. There are many reasons for this, of course. One is that we have never learned to practise solidarity among ourselves. In our struggle for a place in the sun in our patriarchal society we have all too often had to vie with other women. Another reason is that in the new women's movement we have continued to dodge the issue of our long-overdue class analysis. The women's issue is also a class issue — we should not let our newly awakened sense of sisterhood blind us to that. Women in the third world are today discovering that their own commitment to job and family and the women's movement is only possible because they have the help of cheap servants. "Our liberation is happening on these poor women's shoulders," a friend wrote to me from the Philippines recently. We must get that into our heads if we are to understand and respect the different starting points for liberation. What does sisterhood mean for the women who seek refuge in a women's shelter because they have been battered and raped; for Lesbian women who still have to put up with discrimination; for the prostitutes in third-world countries who serve men from the cities of Europe? What does sisterhood mean for workers' wives, for women farm workers, for mothers with small children in our affluent societies, who often find themselves intellectually and socially isolated for many years? What does it mean for women in their mid-forties who are told they are too old to return to their profession, and anyway, with the recession...? How can we bring about real solidarity across the lines of such varied living situations?

How can we say "I" *and* "we", how can we link self-discovery and social commitment? The two are not alternatives, they belong together. To me, the future of the women's movement depends for a little while on how we experience and live with the tension between the "I" and the "we". With other women in the ecumenical movement I have learned that it is possible to live with this tension.

I remember a women's conference where a woman from the USA washed the feet of a woman from Nicaragua. That was a personal human gesture for both of them and at the same time a tiny sign of solidarity and reconciliation in a situation of conflict between peoples. It points a way forward for us women: the women's movement must become an ecumenical movement in a double sense. It must go beyond individual interests, however justified, and widen its thinking and its efforts to a new world, a world that is healed and made whole. And it must learn to practise solidarity with the various efforts women are making to create a new culture. To play off the different "feminisms" against one another is part and parcel of the basic pattern of "divide and rule" of which we are always accusing the "oppressors". Instead we must hold up the possibility of a worldwide community of women (and men) which, fragile and vulnerable as it may be, is nevertheless an effective reality.

An oikoumene of women?

An oikoumene of women is not the same thing as women in the oikoumene. The deeper significance of our efforts for the quotas was to bring women into the ecumenical movement. We wanted women to be there, just as we wanted young people, representatives of oppressed groups, handicapped people and other categories to be there. Women in the ecumenical movement are women who have made ecumenical history — the women who have defended the women's cause with courage and tenacity. Today we are in the process of taking the next step. The oikoumene of women is a worldwide community of women, active in many fields, who are engaged in altering the face of the world and of the ecumenical movement. They need encouragement, help, information, sistership to enable them to develop the gifts they can bring to help shape the future of the ecumenical movement.

I should like just to mention three such women's gifts which made themselves felt in Vancouver. The women dared to talk about their experiences. They showed that experiences are not just stories to decorate intelligent thinking, but are themselves intelligent thinking. In the last analysis all issues are problems with which people have to live, from which they suffer and to which they seek solutions, as they try to make life better.

The women showed that we can find ways of combining the different aspects of our humanity — intellect, feelings, physicality, closeness to others or distance from them. In the women's progamme organized at the "Well" they tried it out successfully during the Assembly. They finally found how to talk about conflicts without for all that denying one another solidarity. Some conflicts remained, of course, together with the painful realization that we cannot get rid of them by good will alone. Yet there also remained the sense of belonging together nonetheless. We women had thought it important to experience living together for a little — a shared experience of life generally binds people together more than a consensus achieved in debates and documents.

My hope for the oikoumene of women is that they will persevere in offering their gifts — and in so doing will slowly change the face of the whole oikoumene, making it more transparent, freeing it from all the superstructures which block our vision of Jesus Christ, the one who gives us the courage to be our own, liberated persons working together for the kingdom of God.

The Scientific-Environmental Crisis

Where do the Churches Stand?

Charles Birch

A leading economist said that "no one ever died of over-population". The American journal *Science* responded with an editorial under that title. Just at that time disastrous floods in the delta region of the river Ganges in Bangladesh had taken the lives of thousands of villagers and left countless others homeless. What killed these hapless people? The editorial argues that they died from over-population. The region is prone to periodic disastrous flooding. It is populated because suitable living spaces in Bangladesh are already overcrowded and the poor are forced to live in perilous places. After each flood they go back again because they are denied space elsewhere. What causes over-population in Bangladesh? The direct answer is science and technology through its two agents — insecticides and antibiotics. As in many other developing countries these agents have been instrumental in reducing the death-rate quite dramatically with consequent surges in population growth. Creativity and frustration have been the twin hallmarks of many of the most important scientific advances in the century.

Consuming our own future

The semi-arid belt of the Sahel which stretches from Mauritania in the West to Ethiopia in the East was until recently inhabited largely by nomadic peoples. Their agricultural practices, learned over the centuries, conserved the soil and its vegetation for continued pastoral use. The situation changed in the 50s and 60s. Nomads were restricted. New strains of cotton and peanuts were introduced. Attempts were made to introduce a more intensive agriculture by sinking wells to irrigate the land. Over-grazing followed. In drought years disaster ensued and the desert extended further south. The total situation is more complex than this. It includes rapid population growth, political upheavals and land policies that made life difficult for farmers. As a result per capita food production has declined steadily in recent years. In this science and technology have played a part with the introduction of new crops and in

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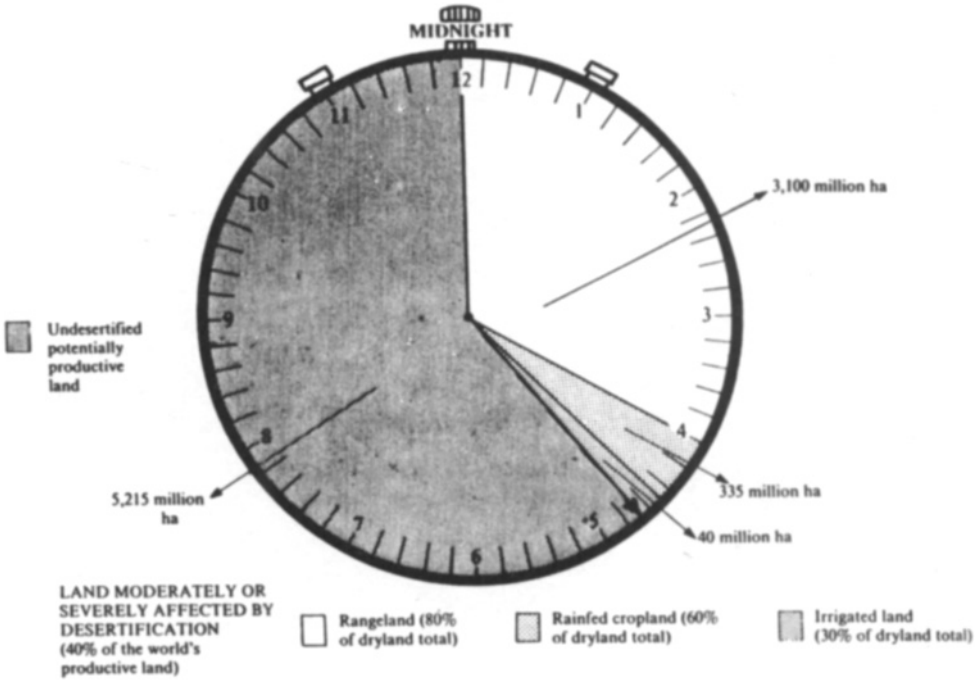
The time bomb of desertification



The clock is ticking, an environmental time bomb. It is now 4:48 p.m. At the rate of 27 million hectares lost a year to the desert or to zero economic productivity, in a little less than 200 years at the current rate of desertification there will not be a single, fully productive hectare of land on earth. It will be the earth's midnight. We can expect the rate to increase as less land is exploited by more people. We can also be sure that a major socio-economic catastrophe of cataclysmic proportions would engulf the earth long before the last hectare succumbed. We are already feeling the first tremors of that catastrophe.

(Annual Report United Nations Environment Programme 1986, Part 1, page 92.)

facilitating the digging of wells and removal of trees on a massive scale. This is happening in arid regions all over the world. In the last ten years productive land the size of the twelve countries of the European Community has been turned to dust. The UN Environment Programme warns that one-third of the entire land surface of the world is now in danger. The foundations of civilization in these places crumble to sand. No other civilization has set about consuming its future with such enthusiasm as our own.

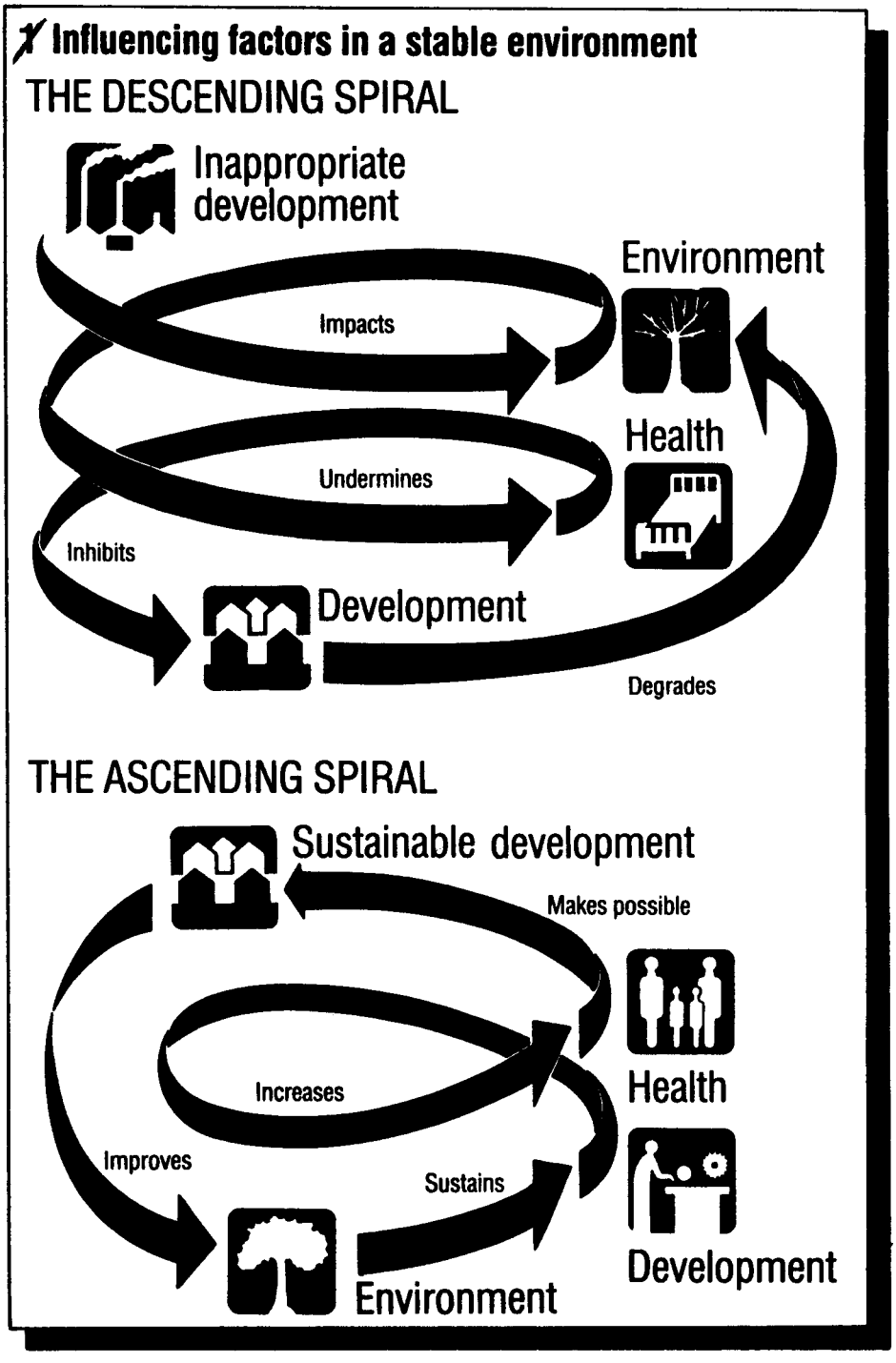
The central desert of Australia, which is the largest desert in the world, is expanding its frontiers towards the coastal regions in the south and the east. Strains of sheep and cattle that can live in arid places have been invented by breeders. Over-grazing has removed much of the natural vegetation and desertification follows. A wealthy state like New South Wales can afford to take drastic measures. These include taking the farmer and the animals off the land and letting it go back to the kangaroos who manage it better than humans. So there are now huge areas on the eastern fringes of the desert preserved as national parks to act as a buffer to further expansion of the desert.

Probably the two most productive areas on earth in this century are the San Joachim and the Sacramento valleys in California. Intensive agriculture involving irrigation and the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers on a grand scale have resulted in huge crop yields. But the application of modern science and technology is having long-term deleterious effects on continued productivity. There is evidence that the capacity of the soil to sustain high crop yields is diminishing. The question is now being asked: Is modern agriculture sustainable in these valleys? Eventually science may have to invent a new sort of agriculture, using a different sort of science and management from that used in the past.

"Area's growth imperils Los Angeles" was a recent headline in the *Los Angeles Times*. The second largest city in the US is reaching its capacity to absorb more people. The city's freeways are clogged. The air lanes are clogged and dangerous. Its only garbage land-fill will be full within eight years. Its sewer system cannot withstand heavy rains without overflowing. The schools are bursting and housing is so costly that some 50,000 people are said to be living illegally in garages. In one of the wealthiest nations on earth science and technology, in league with wealth, have produced a city which many now regard as a monster, as unsuited to survival as was the dinosaur in an earlier epoch. One problem of the Western world is how to dismantle its dinosaurs. What we thought was technological progress has brought with it new problems of gigantic dimensions.

Science and technology are today a large and powerful force and to a great extent an evil force in the world. This is nowhere more evident than in the work of half the scientists and technologists of the world who are engaged in science and technology for war. A single thermonuclear bomb has the destructive force of all the bombs of the Second World War. The US and the Soviet Union have rigged the planet with 60,000 nuclear warheads. If less than ten percent of these warheads were exploded a billion people would be killed and the earth would enter a nuclear winter of darkness and cold. The most serious ecological issue on earth today is the effect of a nuclear war on the life-support systems of the earth.

The probable effects of nuclear war raise more starkly than any other the fact that increasingly there is no longer such a thing as a local environmental problem. When you and I use an aerosol can containing flourocarbons as propellants we contribute to



(The state of the environment: environment and health, United Nations Environment Programme 1986, page viii.)

the worldwide thinning of the ozone layer of the stratosphere which protects life from the fatal effects of ultra-violet radiation. Only an international approach can deal with this problem. The carbon dioxide we produce from factories in Europe and forest fires in Brazil contribute to the global glass-house effect that could heat up the planet. If a lid were put over the whole of the United States life would eventually cease because the US uses up more oxygen than it produces. Oxygen generated by green plants is carried by winds across the globe. Much of it comes from the plants on the surface of the oceans. Every breath we take includes a billion molecules of oxygen that have come from plants. And every molecule we breathe in has been, at one time, in the lungs of every one of the 50 billion humans who have ever lived. The simple act of breathing connects us in this intimate way with the plants and every person of the past of every race, religion and culture.

Responses to science and technology

Science and technology have brought us this sort of information about ourselves and the world we live in. It has brought us the power to feed, clothe, shelter and heal everyone on earth. It has also brought us a gleaming Damocles sword of destruction that hangs over our heads. There is a variety of responses to this ambiguity of science and technology. There is the naive and romantic response that science and technology are bad and we had best get on without them. The WCC conference on "Science, Faith and the Future" at MIT in 1979 got into difficulties here with a third-world concern about the evils of modern development due to science and technology. No one who was there will forget Rubem Alves' vivid metaphor of the third world as the lamb and science as the wolf preying upon it. Secondly there is the view that science and technology are neutral and it is their use by politicians that results in good or evil. That too is simplistic. There is at least a third more realistic position that science and technology are themselves not value-free and therefore scientists and technologists have a responsibility for what their science does to the world.

The ambiguity of the effects of science and technology has two sources. On the one hand as knowledge grows arithmetically our ignorance grows geometrically. The more we know the more ignorant we discover we are. We are, for example, discovering that there are limits that life on a finite planet impose on economic and demographic expansion. But what precisely those limits are we do not know. Nor do we know how to gear society to living within possible impending limits.

Secondly the ambiguity of science and technology is tied, in a way which has been little understood, with an ambiguity in how we picture science to understand ourselves and our world. There is a dominant model of science today that suits the view of the earth as a factory for the exclusive use of human beings to exploit. This model is known as the mechanistic or substance model of science. It is so called because it takes the machine as its central image of what science investigates. There is good reason for this. The major advances of science up to now have been achieved on the assumption that the world and all that is in it are to be investigated as if they were machines. The so-called Newtonian universe was a gigantic clockwork universe. It depended for its understanding on two notions: particles or substances, and the pushing around of these particles. Matter and motion are all there is to the making of a universe. Newton's laws are laws about matter in motion. Now it is true that we got to the moon on Newton's laws. The modern discoveries of molecular biology that have led to the possibilities of

genetic engineering are also advances of mechanistic science. As a methodology mechanistic science has been highly successful. But as a metaphysic of nature it has had disastrous consequences.

Science and theology

It is one thing to investigate molecules and frogs and humans as if they are machines. It is quite another to say they are machines. At this point science and religion clashed head on. From the time of Luther onwards there was a tendency for knowledge to be divided into two territories, one for science and another for religion. Science said it had nothing to do with what theologians investigated. Science has no room for God. Theology has no room for science. God was outside the universe except for occasional interventions in the form of miracles. But there was always the reservation that God was more intimately involved in human life, though not in the rest of nature. The 1979 MIT conference came to the conclusion that this is still the dominant position today in the Western world. And so it is. It has been disastrous for science and theology and nature.

This has not been the only response of science. There is the post-modern view of science and of the relation of religion and science. Post-modern refers to post-mechanistic. In physics this is the view that stems from quantum physics which no longer talks of the world as made up of bits and pieces called particles. There are no particles! There are no substances in the sense of things that exist independently of other things. A.N. Whitehead saw this long ago when he wrote: "There is no entity, not even God, that requires nothing but itself in order to exist." What exists are events and relationships between events. This is not the place to go further into this subject. Suffice it to point out that it does lead to a much more holistic and less materialistic (i.e. less substantialist) understanding of nature. Biology has been slower than physics to move in this post-mechanistic direction. Yet there are today a number of leading biologists who see the emphasis on mechanistic analysis as the result of a historical path of least resistance. Those problems that yield to attack are pursued most vigorously, precisely because the method works there. Other problems and other phenomena are left behind, walled off from understanding by exclusive commitment to a mechanistic analysis. Areas of biology that have been most resistant to mechanistic analysis are the phenomenon of behaviour, mind and consciousness and the urge to live itself. Post-modern biology is making room for the subjective in its approach to these issues. Mechanistic science rejects the subjective from its analysis.

It is the substance view of the world by both science and theology that has blocked the way to any healthy relations between the two. The post-modern understanding of science and its relation to religion opens up new creative relationships. For example, all the scientists I know who could be called post-modern ask religious questions. In the post-modern view it is relevant to find roles for purpose, value and feeling. As opposed to the mechanical model of the world and life we can call this quite radical view an ecological model of reality because it puts the emphasis on relationships and not substances.

In one sense there is nothing new about the post-modern position. There has always been a stream in both science and theology that has emphasized the organic rather than the mechanical. It has taken as its starting point, not the reduction of the world to bits and pieces, but the experience of real live human beings. What we feel in ourselves

and know ourselves to be reflects the nature of all reality. The human becomes one with nature. And God is involved in the being, not only of humans, but the rest of creation. This has always been an emphasis of Eastern Christendom, but it was lacking in the West. What is new is that the way is now opened up to explore the meaning of the presence of God in the world and the presence of the world in God in the light of modern science. There was no way of doing this in the basis of the mechanical model of nature.

Towards a life-centred ethic

The consequences of a post-modern position for action are revolutionary. The world is no longer a factory for the exclusive use of human beings. It is alive with God. It is not only human beings who are of value. Wherever there is life and feeling there is intrinsic value. The bird that falls to the ground has value to itself and it has value to God. The non-human creation is not simply the stage on which the drama of human life is performed. It is itself part of the drama with all creatures in their varying degrees participating in the joys and sufferings of creation. If that be true, it is incumbent upon us to respect the non-human creation. It is incumbent upon us to move away from our exclusively anthropocentric ethic to a life-centred ethic. And because all living creatures have an intrinsic value in themselves to themselves and as well to God this ethic is appropriately also called a theo-centric ethic.

The churches have not been in the vanguard of movements pressing for a life-centred ethic. The reasons are in part historical and include the belief that our main task is to remove the oppression of and injustice to humans. But this is not a case of either/or. It is a case of both/and. We are called to fight oppression wherever it exists both in human life and in non-human life. We are called upon to look after nature, not only because nature looks after us but also because nature has its own intrinsic value to itself and to God.

The Programme of the WCC for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation holds the possibility of this new emphasis. But so far it seems to be more serious about justice and peace than it is about integrity of creation. Yet in each example with which I commenced this essay, and countless others could be added, human suffering and deprivation were closely tied to a disintegrating creation. We might do better in our endeavours for justice and peace if we could see more clearly the relationship of the integrity of the creation of human wellbeing and the wellbeing of the non-human creatures themselves. An emphasis on human justice without respect for the creation can lead to the promotion of economic growth as the major objective leading in the end to injustice. We need to ask how the concept of justice can be broadened to include the non-human creation. It has been said that peace is the active living out of justice. Is not justice also the active living out of a respect for the integrity of all creation?

Documents of the WCC since the Vancouver Assembly have, for the most part, used the phrase integrity of creation without specifying any meaning to it. I would suggest for consideration that integrity of creation has two meanings. On the one hand, there is the scientific meaning of the interdependence of living organisms and their environment in the complex web of life. Just how critical any of these relationships is is a matter of dispute amongst ecologists. Paul Ehrlich, for example, argues strongly for the preservation of all species in the web of life. He uses the analogy of the "rivet popper". As you walk from the terminal towards your airliner, you notice a man on a

ladder prying rivets out of its wing. In your concern you ask him what he is up to. "I work for the airline Growthmania Intercontinental," the man replies. "The airline has discovered that it can sell these rivets for two dollars apiece." "But how do you know you won't fatally weaken the wing doing that?" you enquire. "Don't worry," he assures you. "I'm certain the manufacturers made this plane much stronger than it needs to be, so no harm is done. Besides I've taken lots of rivets from this wing and it hasn't fallen off yet. Growthmania Airlines needs the money; if we didn't pop the rivets, Growthmania wouldn't be able to continue expanding." None of us has to fly on that particular airline. But all of us are passengers on a very large space ship. one on which we have no option but to fly. And frighteningly it is swarming with rivet poppers. These are the people whose activities result in the extermination of species and populations of non-human organisms at the present rate of one thousand species a year. This could rise to ten thousand species a year or one per hour by the 1990s. Ehrlich argues that ecosystems are far more complex than wings of aircraft. We have little idea as to which and how many species can be allowed to disappear without disastrous consequences. A thirteenth rivet popped from a wing, or the extinction of a key species involved in the cycling of nitrogen, could lead to a serious malfunctioning of the life-support systems of the planet. In most cases, says Ehrlich, an ecologist can no more predict the consequences of the extinction of a given species than an airline passenger can assess the loss of a single rivet. Before much more time has passed, attitudes need to change so that no sane passenger on Spaceship Earth will accept a continuous loss of populations or species of non-human organisms. The cause of most extinctions of species in our time is the disappearance of habitats. Every minute, for example, four football fields of forest disappear from the face of the earth. Much of this is tropical rain forests which have within them the greatest diversity of species of any terrestrial habitat. Ehrlich and his colleagues have recently formed the Club of Earth to promote research into these critical issues.

A second meaning can be attributed to the phrase integrity of creation. It is a theological meaning. I suggest for consideration that in this context integrity of creation refers to the intrinsic value and the instrumental value of every living organism in its relations to its environment and to God. Analysis of this understanding calls for a deeper investigation of the different intrinsic values and the different instrumental values of different living creatures than has hitherto been made.

The lead in saving the integrity of nature has been given, not by the churches, but by secular movements in conservation and in movements for animal rights. It is time the churches came into the picture with a specific Christian understanding of the relation of nature, humanity and God. I am not suggesting that the churches are ready to do this now. They have been led away from this path by their own exclusive anthropocentrism and the distance they have created between God and the world. Science is ready for the new radical approach. So are many other secular movements in the modern world. It will be a return to religion but not the religion we know. It is a religion we can come to know that we have somehow lost from our own heritage. For the church it can be a great new adventure. Prof. James Gustafson said is his "Ethical Issues in the Human Future": "We must see the place of man in the whole creation, and ought to conduct human life accordingly."[1]

[1] *How Humans Adapt: a Biocultural Odyssey*, D.J. Ortner ed., Washington DC, Smithsonian Press, 1983, p.503.

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Convergence and Divergence in Social Theology

The Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches

Ronald Preston

Convergence

Roman Catholic social theology was isolated from that of the ecumenical movement until the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65. Indeed the papacy had condemned that movement. One of the most welcome changes brought about by the Council was the decree "De Ecumenismo" which acknowledged and welcomed the ecumenical movement and urged Roman Catholics to play their part in it under, of course, the authority of the church. The change with regard to social theology was immediate and striking.

The ecumenical movement had achieved by then a well-developed method in social theology and ethics, largely initiated by J.H. Oldham in the preparatory work for the Oxford conference on "Church, Community and State" in 1937. This was epitomized in the book by W.A. Visser 't Hooft and J.H. Oldham issued just before the conference, *The Church and its Function in Society*. It dealt with the nature and role of the church, how it could relate its doctrine to the rapid social and political changes going on in the world, the relation between the doctrine and the facts of these changes, the level of detail in the policies it might be possible to commend, and the necessity of strong lay participation in the process of ecumenical study. It also emphasized the importance of the activities of lay folk in economic, social and political affairs in which 99.5 percent of Christians spend most of their working lives. Oldham's preparatory process for the Oxford conference involved consultations between theologians, experts from other disciplines, and "lay" practitioners. Papers were written, sometimes in preparation for a colloquium, but in any event circulated for comments quite widely to those of other Christian confessions than the author, and then re-written in the light of comments received before incorporation in the material associated with the conference. Six

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volumes of these papers were published shortly after it. Oxford proved a pioneer and a model. In this process only one or two Roman Catholics, of which Jacques Maritain was the best-known, made unofficial contributions.

Potential sources of disagreement in social theology between churches and between individual Christians can be due to three factors: (1) disagreements in interpreting the Bible; (2) disagreements in theologies of church and society all claiming to be derived from, or consonant with, the Bible; and (3) disagreements on analyses of the contemporary situation. The first and second are not in principle unsurmountable; there is no inherent reason why agreement should not be reached, even though we may think it unlikely when we take into account the protean nature of the phenomenon of Christianity. It would have to include agreement on how to move from the first two to the third. Agreement on the third is less likely because of the inherent uncertainties in obtaining and evaluating evidence, and extrapolating from present evidence into the future.

Sources of disagreement between Roman Catholics and others on biblical interpretation have become much less acute since 1943, when the papal encyclical "Divino Afflante Spiritu" gave a blessing to modern biblical study after it had been practically suppressed in the wake of the modernist controversy in the first decade of this century. In terms of theologies of church and society, if we follow Richard Niebuhr's typology in his *Christ and culture* (1951) the Roman Catholic Church had been associated with a "Christ over culture" position, which seems implausible in the modern world. But here again the sources of disagreement became much less acute after Vatican II, when a shift to Niebuhr's fifth type "Christ transforming culture" was clearly discernible.

Moreover, all three sources of disagreement are found within confessional traditions and not only between them. They arise within the World Council of Churches and within the Roman Catholic Church and between them. If they are faced realistically they are not a reason for separation in working in the field of church and society, a point to which I shall return.

It was the pastoral constitution on "The Church in the Modern World" ("Gaudium et Spes") which marked the change in social theology. This theme was not on the agenda when the Council met. It was added largely due to the influence of Cardinal Suenens of Brussels. Work on it had to be fast and intense, and it was promulgated only on the penultimate day of the Council. It is characterized by four important features which have remained of central importance in relation to cooperation between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in social theology.

1. It is not "churchy" in tone, but stresses both the dignity of the human person and the community of humankind. It argues for a fuller achievement of human rights, with Christians working with all men and women of good will to that end. Justice is the norm and love is to be the driving force. The church has been too conservative in the past and should be the servant of the truly human.
2. It adopts a more flexible theology to cope with rapid social change. In particular it sees that a blanket condemnation of atheism is inadequate, including a blind anti-communism. John XXIII's opening to a Marxist-Christian dialogue in his 1963 encyclical "Pacem in Terris" paved the way for this.
3. The theology is less individualistic and more corporate in its concern for the universal common good and the structures of social life. The social rather than the

individual nature of property is stressed, and the freedom of individuals and groups found more in the principle of subsidiarity than in private property.

4. There is a new respect for the autonomy of the secular; of ethics, of the social sciences and of the natural sciences. The church has not all the answers. "Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission" (par. 43). Laymen should keep the laws proper to each discipline, and labour to equip themselves with genuine expertise in their various fields, gladly working with men seeking the same goals. This point was later to be developed by Pius VI in his Apostolic Letter to Cardinal Roy "Octogesima Adveniens" (1971), where he points out that in widely differing situations in the world it is difficult for Rome to propound "solutions" which have universal validity. It is "up to Christian communities to analyze the situation which is proper to their own country... and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church" (par. 4). This should be done in dialogue with other Christians and all men of good will.

The Geneva conference of 1966 on "Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time", designed as a successor to Oxford, had active Roman Catholic participant observers, several of whom had been involved in the background work for "Gaudium et Spes". This registered the new atmosphere which had so rapidly developed. It seemed that resources of good will and a desire for cooperation which had been latent now gushed out. The line taken by "Gaudium et Spes" was so similar to that which had been developed in the ecumenical movement that there was no difficulty in Roman Catholics incorporating themselves in the work of the Geneva conference, and it was no surprise that the thought which emerged from it was very similar to that of the Pastoral Constitution. Moreover there was an impressive convergence in their diagnosis of the contemporary situation, and in the general directions in which they thought the church should use its influence. This broad convergence has continued, and it is noteworthy that such a wide spectrum of responsible church reflection should be at variance with the backlash which has developed in the last ten years in some countries, often characterized by some such term as "the new Right".

In the years after 1966 there was much collaboration. The Encyclical "Populorum Progressio" was in accord with the thinking in World Council of Churches circles on the economic and political relationships that should exist between the wealthy first world and the two-thirds economically poor world. It led to the setting up of Sodepax, the joint agency of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, on Society, Development and Peace. This sponsored consultations at Beirut in 1968 and at Montreal in 1969 on this theme, and one on a theology of development at Cartigny in Switzerland, also in 1969. A similar initiative with regard to peace was held in 1970 at Baden in Austria.

It was at Geneva in 1966 that the world of ecumenical consultation first heard the demand for drastic social change coming from Latin America, sufficiently drastic for the term revolutionary to be used of it, not necessarily implying that violence would be involved but not ruling it out. It was maintained that all other avenues of reforming economically blatantly unjust and politically repressive regimes were

blocked. This was the first encounter with liberation theology which within a decade was to be a major preoccupation far beyond Latin America.

The question of theology and revolution was examined more systematically at a joint Consultation of Church and Society and Faith and Order in 1968 at Zagorsk, near Moscow. This was parallelled in Roman Catholic circles at the second conference of Latin American bishops at Medellín in Colombia in the same year. There had also been Roman Catholic participants at Zagorsk. The theme has remained on the agenda ever since. The Synod of Roman Catholic bishops in Rome in 1971 produced a document "Justice in the World" which had a new stress on collective as well as individual sin, and on oppressive and dehumanizing structures. The theme was continued at the third meeting of Latin American bishops at Puebla in 1979 which, despite what many expected, stayed broadly with what had been said at Medellín. As is well known the World Council of Churches has been dominated by this emphasis.

However, Zagorsk had other tasks. It produced systematic work on method in Christian social ethics and on ecclesiology and social ethics. This clarified the procedures which had developed in the ecumenical movement since the work of J.H. Oldham. It is the last systematic reflection within the World Council of Churches on these issues and a new effort is overdue. Moreover there have been examples since Vatican II of the Roman Catholic Church following a similar procedure in social ethics. Pius VI's letter to Cardinal Roy has already been mentioned. It was a *letter* and not an encyclical. It referred to the difficulty of giving universal guidance and instruction. In addition there is the problem of knowing in the case of encyclicals from where the input behind them has come. "Quadragesimo Anno" (1931) was drafted by one man, and he came subsequently to think of it as an irresponsible procedure. The noted moral theologian Bernard Häring put this cogently in his *Morality is for Persons* (1971):

> The authority of the magisterium will be greater... if it is really based on a wide range of thinking and discussion. If the Pope relies on only a handful of advisers belonging to one school of thought, then the "authority" when teaching about the natural law will inevitably suffer... as has been the case with such matters as usury, torture, the burning of witches, the castration of choirboys (who sang in the Sistine Chapel) and the like.

For this reason the method of the recent initiatives of the Roman Catholic episcopate in the USA is timely. It has used two weighty Pastoral Letters, of some 70,000 words each, the first "The Challenge of Peace: God's Providence and our Response" (1983), and the second "Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy" (1986). It has taken the point made by "Octogesima Adveniens" more seriously than the Vatican itself has done. The procedure of the American bishops has been (1) to hear evidence from a wide variety of witnesses, Catholic, Protestant and secular; (2) to issue two preparatory drafts for public discussion and comment, saying in effect "this is what we are thinking of saying and we should be glad to receive your reactions before we finalize it"; (3) carefully to clarify the claim to authority made by different elements in it, and to invite further reflection; and (4) to quote extensively from Vatican documents wherever they are useful and appropriate.

Divergence

So much for convergence. There have been difficulties since 1965-66 which are due to divergences. The first concerns population questions. The encyclical "Humanae Vitae" (1968) argues against contraception, and although this concerns personal rather than social morality, in so far as a distinction can be made between the two, it had a direct bearing on public policy concerning population questions. The furore it aroused within Roman Catholic circles is well known. Nevertheless, the Vatican is officially committed to it, so that where cooperation between the World Council of Churches and the Vatican is concerned it has been necessary to avoid any areas where this issue could arise, for the Vatican would not favour any joint document in which more than one opinion on it is given some church endorsement as if it were open to discussion. This avoidance was the case with Sodepax. And it is surprising in how many contexts population questions arise in which this issue lies in the background.

Then the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church are very different in their role, their relations to their constituencies, and their internal ways of working. Both need sociological examination lest ecclesiological theories do not take account of actual practice. Although the World Council of Churches has had to define the very limited sense in which it has authority vis-à-vis its member churches it has nothing like the centralization of, nor the claims to authority emanating from, the Vatican. There is nothing in the World Council of Churches resembling preoccupation with the shades of demarcation within the authority of the magisterium which characterizes the Roman Catholic Church. The preoccupation arises because there is a wide margin between maximum and minimum claims made for it. Where the weight lies at any time is related to power structures within the church, and in particular within the Vatican, which keep Vatican-watchers busy with their interpretations. It was difficulties with the semi-independent role of Sodepax in moving ahead in social-theological exploration instead of merely propagating what was handed to it that led to its demise.

Moreover, since 1969 the World Council of Churches has developed a much stronger action stance. The Programme to Combat Racism has aroused most controversy in this respect. This stance has produced problems within the World Council of Churches itself. Parts of its constituency have been uneasy. At times in some sections the emphasis has been so much more on action first and reflection afterwards as to be one-sided, in that the reflection has tended merely to justify the action and to be selective in its sources to achieve this. The level of quality in study bequeathed by J.H. Oldham has not always been maintained. There is no reason why these differing methods cannot be creatively handled. To have problems is endemic in the whole World Council of Churches enterprise. But it makes the Vatican nervous of what it might let itself in for in cooperating with the World Council of Churches.

Connected with this is the challenge of liberation theology. This has come from the overwhelmingly Roman Catholic area of Latin America, where it is advocated with great power by a minority in the church, albeit a substantial minority; and also by a much smaller minority within the Protestant churches. These are the ecumenically minded Protestants; most are pietistic and indifferent or hostile to the World Council of Churches. While the World Council of Churches has been taking liberation theology very seriously the Vatican has issued two Instructions which are cool towards it: the first, "Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation" (1984), and the second,

"Christian Freedom and Liberation" (1986). They came from the Sacred Congregation for the Defence of the Faith which of its very nature is backward-looking, and regards repeating the past as the proper teaching for the present. Innovation is against its nature. It thinks of theology as a pure deposit existing in a social, political and cultural vacuum. It cannot easily cope with structured sin and its effect on thought. It finds it hard to think of the church as the pilgrim people of God. Formally it accepts Vatican II, as indeed it must, but it finds it hard to take on board the new emphases which led to the flowering of cooperation with the World Council of Churches in the mid sixties.

Both bodies face the problem of achieving a social theology and method in ethics adequate to deal with a rapidly changing world. There is a spectrum of views within both bodies. But Rome officially finds it hard to accept this because of its centralization and the power of the Curia. What was in origin a civil service has become a powerful body for policy-formation within the authority of the magisterium, and it has its own "pecking order" of power within itself. So does the World Council of Churches, but there it is more open. The Curia plays no part in Roman Catholic ecclesiology. It is not mentioned in the documents of Vatican II. No sociological study of it has been made. Yet the implementation of the impetus of the Council at the official level largely depends upon it. In the World Council of Churches the faintly parallel situation is the influence of the staff by the very fact of being continuously on the job. This puts them in a much stronger position than the members of the Central Committee, still more of the Assembly, who meet occasionally for short periods and are scattered over the globe. The staff can have great influence over priorities, the way they are carried out, and who are brought in as advisers and consultants. There is nothing necessarily sinister in this, provided it is acknowledged and allowed for.

Within the Roman Catholic Church there is an intense debate which has a bearing on cooperation or lack of it with the World Council of Churches. It is concerned with method in moral theology or Christian ethics. As far as specific examples go it is largely concerned with sexual ethics. But method in one area cannot be isolated from method in other areas, and the debate has in fact gone on in respect of issues of nuclear war, with the intriguing result that the more conservative in sexual ethics have proved more radical on nuclear issues. The debate is largely about the understanding of the human person and, as we have seen, it was precisely the stand of "Gaudium et Spes" on this that was one of the two factors which led to the breakthrough in cooperation in social ethics with the World Council of Churches.

Traditional moral theology operated within a fixed idea of nature, including human nature. The human body was divided into various faculties, each of them studied in isolation. On this basis detailed ethical conclusions were deduced which were fixed and timeless. Thus the sexual organs were seen as intended by nature for procreation, so that any use of them which deliberately tries to prevent this is unnatural. It was also preoccupied with the limits of obligation to follow the moral law. Cases of conscience were argued in terms that seemed to be concerned with the minimum level which must be observed to be free from mortal sin. Traditional manuals of moral theology in their preoccupation with law had little mention of Christ or central Christian doctrines and indeed little reference to the Bible. Vatican II vastly hastened the reaction against this. The old manuals have been cast aside. What is human is still a central point, but a dynamic view is taken of the human person and the dignity of personhood; and not

only of what humans have in common, but also the importance of the exercise of conscientious judgment by each person in all the varieties of personhood and personal situations.

It is within this new framework that the lively debate has been taking place. The focus of it has been two related questions. (1) The autonomy of ethics: that is to say whether there is any *content* to Christian ethics (apart from the duty to worship God) beyond what applies to all men and women; whether the Christian faith rather provides a distinctive *ground* for following detailed ethical conclusions which others may, and probably should, come to on their own grounds. (2) Whether there are absolute moral rules which are always to be followed, or whether the moral rules found in the Bible or elaborated in Christian tradition in terms of natural law are historical and contextual in character; in that case there is no absolute moral rule independent of circumstances. Moral judgment is an art rather than a science, and *prudence* is the essential quality needed in exercising it. Living in the fellowship of Christian thought and worship is a school of moral discernment or wisdom; in it conscience is educated, so that our moral decisions in the uncertainties and ambiguities of life will show discernment. The root question will then be not whether we are obedient to a fixed moral rule but whether our "fundamental option" (to quote a phrase of Karl Rahner) is for the mind of Christ as we conscientiously try to discern it. This applies of course to the whole range of ethical issues, from the more personal to the collective where we are bound together in structures with others.

In this debate the more conservative, and that includes the Sacred Congregation for the Defence of the Faith, think a-historically and provide defences on either biblical or natural law grounds, or both, for traditional conclusions held before the reformation of moral theology. This has been noteworthy in various Instructions from the SCDF on sexual issues — for instance homosexuality and *in vitro* fertilization — and, as already noted, on liberation theology. Moreover moral theologians not connected with the SCDF and not confined to the Roman Catholic Church (Paul Ramsey, for one) argue that there are basic human goods which are characteristic of human beings and which give a basic fixity to human nature. In his magisterial book *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (1980) the Roman Catholic John Finnis, Reader in Law in Oxford University, lists seven such goods: life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, friendship, practical reasonableness and religion. Others have put forward lists which are similar. I do not think there would be much disagreement among Christians about them. How far they carry agreement in non-Western cultures is one that has continually to be explored. But the crux of the argument is the next step, and it is here that the issue of divergence from what is generally thought in World Council of Churches circles arises. It is argued that these goods are incommensurable. There is no common denominator which would enable us to weigh one against another. So they must all be equally respected. We must never damage or destroy an instance of any one human good in desiring another. Hence we arrive at moral absolutes.

Those who do not agree with this think that the argument about incommensurability is contrary to common sense. In fact we do continually make comparisons between values in particular situations; nor can we rank them in a fixed hierarchy of importance, for that too varies with different situations. Their position in its cautious form is that we must not do evil directly or indirectly, but we may allow evil to occur if, and only if, there is proportionate reason to do so. Put more broadly, faced with

difficult decisions and conflicting values we should decide on an action which in our conscientious judgment is likely to produce the greatest harvest of values and the minimum of disvalues in the circumstances. Those who take the first view hold that there is no situation in which there is a conflict between human goods such that there is no action possible which respects all of them. Those who take the second view hold that life does throw up such situations of conflicts of interest in which some have to be sacrificed in favour of others.

The problem within the Roman Catholic Church is not just that the SCDF takes the first view, but that it is maintaining that all those who hold "official" teaching positions in Roman Catholic institutions must take it too. This is the basic issue in the case of Charles Curran. In fact very many Roman Catholic moral theologians take the second view (my guess is that in the English-speaking world, of which I know more, it is a majority). The SCDF is not finding it easy to win general assent. As its Instructions appear they are not uniformly accepted and welcome, but subject to detailed and widespread, but respectable, criticism.

This whole debate has obvious affinities with the situation ethics debate which raged, largely in Protestant circles, from about 1960-75, and then petered out. The World Council of Churches had its own Humanum Study (1969-75) which might have been expected to engage with this Roman Catholic debate, but it went off in a different direction and it, too, has petered out. The intriguing point to note is that the Roman Catholic debate does not depend upon any peculiar Roman Catholic doctrine (though the weight of tradition is in the background), but is an argument about the rational basis of morality which anyone can enter and no one can avoid. One must admire the way in which some of the best minds in the Roman Catholic Church persist in working away at clarifying and resolving the issues. Protestants do not exhibit the same staying power, but tend to tire and chase the next new slant that emerges.

Those in Protestant circles who on biblical or confessional grounds are disposed to take a position somewhat similar to that of the SCDF are mostly not ecumenically minded. They are either minorities within the churches which are members of the World Council of Churches, or belong to churches which will not join it. So within its Protestant constituency the World Council of Churches encounters this debate in only a minor way. It is another matter with respect to the Orthodox. In general they have not yet met the full force of questions which moral theology has not been able to avoid. When they do they will have to go beyond patristics and the first eight centuries to cope with them. But this article is not focused on the Orthodox situation.

Prospects for cooperation

To what conclusions does this survey of convergences and divergences between the social thought of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church point with respect to future cooperation? I do not think an unambiguous answer is possible. It is obviously easier if the fact of a spectrum of positions within confessional traditions is acknowledged and even welcomed, in the sense that there is a resolve to handle the resulting tensions creatively. It is more difficult if the authorities in one particular church or confession will only officially recognize one position, as the SCDF is doing. But the World Council of Churches has lived with the restrictions imposed by this situation, as far as population questions go, since "Humanae Vitae", and there seems no reason why it cannot continue to do so in other areas where it may

apply. The World Council of Churches cannot directly affect the internal debate with the Roman Catholic Church (unless invited to, as observers were at Vatican II), but the more Roman Catholics are associated with the work of the World Council of Churches the more it will contribute indirectly.

Different interpretations of the Bible, different social theologies, different factual analyses of the contemporary scene are not fixed and immovable, but are likely to exist in some form until the parousia. Convergences and divergences will vary. Stockholm thought that doctrine divides but service (action) unites. On the other hand the Programme to Combat Racism showed that service can divide when doctrine unites. Yet again, after the war there was much division within ecumenical circles between those who were Barthian in theology and those who were not, yet their diagnosis of the direction in which church influence should be exerted in social and political issues was much the same, and this gave a great impetus to the witness of the World Council of Churches in its early days. So did the very similar lines of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches after Vatican II. There is nothing in the sources of divergences which precludes cooperation. It depends on whether there is a will to work together. The challenge to the churches of the Lund Faith and Order conference of 1952 to do together all that conscience does not require them to do separately remains. In so far as the leadership of the churches is truly committed to unity and renewal they will find ways of cooperating.

It is with the level of leadership that this article is concerned. I do not doubt that at other levels, less official and more local, more and more cooperation will take place. Roman Catholics and others, separated from one another by centuries of polemics, have come in the last thirty years to meet, to know and to like one another. I do not think anyone will be able to stop them thinking and doing more together. Immense ecclesiological and psychological barriers are being broken down.

At the official level in so far as the Roman Catholic Church follows the line of "De Ecumenismo" cooperation will continue and develop. As far as the World Council of Churches is concerned greater precision, clarity and cohesion within its own units would benefit itself and make official Roman Catholic cooperation easier. Some things may take more time, and some sections may not be able to go so much out on a limb if the Roman Catholic Church is seriously engaged, for instance in the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation programme. But the result would be more worthwhile. The fact is that in the plural societies which characterize the old Christendom the churches can hardly get attention unless the main confessions work together. And in countries where Christians have never been other than a small minority the necessity of working together is equally great.

On the question of methodology, apart from carrying on from the Zagorsk consultation the internal Roman Catholic debate would benefit if put in a larger ecumenical setting. As to the immediate agenda the JPIC programme is enormous and potentially fissiparous. It would greatly benefit from Roman Catholic cooperation at every level. Some background questions which need clarification include:

1. What do we mean today by prophecy as distinct from biblical times? How far can the churches, sociologically considered, be agents of social change?
2. How far can analyses of the current situation by church-related groups overcome ideological differences?

3. What are the parameters of proper church commitments in areas of social ethics, as distinct from the role of the lay person as citizen?
4. What is the role of symbolic actions by churches and by individual Christians (e.g. covenanting), as distinct from the search for effective and appropriate actions for social change?

Then there is the empirical task of analyzing the facts and the trends, global and regional, and the process of checking and counter-checking in the course of seeing how far an ecumenical consensus emerges for the churches to commend to their constituency and to all persons of good will. This is particularly appropriate if it can be achieved, at the middle level between general diagnoses and detailed policies. The scope has become wider and more complex since J.H. Oldham's day, but the need for ecumenical cooperative work of the highest quality remains as great as ever. Nothing short of excellence will do. In 1937 the churches achieved this. Roman Catholic cooperation is an almost indispensable factor in achieving it now. The Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches may go it alone, but each will be much impoverished if they do.

The Challenge of the "New Thinking" in Eastern Europe

Heino Falcke

Enquiry into the attitude of the churches in Eastern Europe on the socialist state and socialist ideology has had to give a central place to the "new thinking" ever since the autumn of 1985. This is a term which sums up the political philosophy, the peace policy and the internal political reform (*perestroika* and *glasnost*) associated with the name of Mikhail Gorbachev. This new thinking has brought a marked change and new development in Marxism-Leninism and has confronted the churches with the question of their attitude to this socialism in transformation. Because the new thinking embraces responsibility for the future in a worldwide perspective, it also presents a challenge to the ecumenical movement as a whole.

In the German Democratic Republic, which is the political context of this paper, there are varied and conflicting reactions to the new thinking. While the state broadly approves of the foreign policy and the politics of peace, it has been more cautious about *perestroika* and *glasnost*, i.e. internal political reconstruction and the establishment of openness ("transparency"). Among the people, however, these are already bound up with hopes for the dismantling of bureaucracy, more freedom of opinion and press freedom, and increased opportunities for political participation. But the new thinking is also being used as a weapon for a wholesale criticism of socialism. The claim is that it shows socialism as such has collapsed and is swinging into line with capitalistic methods, but that here the new thinking is inconsistent since (for instance) democratization can (it is claimed) be attained only if one-party rule is abandoned.

We must however respect the fact that in this situation socialism is developing *as* socialism. It is a fact which deserves every sympathy. We are in a transitional situation, a thaw, in which the ice of encrusted and outdated convictions and conditions is breaking but — since reconstruction has not so far been successfully completed — there is still no open water. Many feel safer on the immobile but reliable

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ice and others want to wait till it is possible to navigate the open waters without danger. But the risk exists of getting in among the ice-floes. If Christians and the churches want to share in this risk they must know what they are doing and whether the venture is essential to their mission. They must be clear in their own minds about the direction in which they should be contributing to the process of transformation and about where they must refuse to go. I shall try to approach the issue from four angles.

1. Entry into the new global situation

With the new thinking Marxism-Leninism enters the age of global interdependence and responsibility for survival. It makes survival and co-existence in the world — which though conflict-ridden is nevertheless one world — a yardstick of political responsibility.

Many of Gorbachev's statements show that the new thinking involves an epoch-making awareness. Thus on the problem of security in a world with nuclear weapons he was already saying on 4 October 1985 in Paris:

> This is a completely new situation which means a break with the traditions, the mode of thought and the patterns of behaviour which have established themselves through the centuries and indeed millennia. The human mind does not at once adapt to novelty. That is true for everyone. We can see that for ourselves. We have begun rethinking.[1]

Addressing the International Forum "for a nuclear-free world and the survival of humanity" he sums up the two decisive features of the new situation:

> The last two decades have been marked by the fact that for the first time in its history humanity and not just some of its individual representatives is beginning to see itself as a single whole, to perceive the global inter-relationships of human beings, society and nature and to assess the consequences of what substantially it has been doing.

And:

> We have forced ourselves to grasp the full implications of the fact that by stockpiling and perfecting nuclear weapons the human race has robbed itself of its own immortality. Only if nuclear weapons are destroyed can it be regained.[2]

This change in the situation is so radical that a new philosophy of life is necessary, and he repeatedly reduces it to the formula that humanity, the nations — *we* — must learn the difficult but necessary art of living together in peace.[3]

These views of course are not new. The formula of "new thinking" is quoted from Albert Einstein and the thoughts just reproduced have often been expressed by many political thinkers in the West and also in the ecumenical movement. Here however "new" is important not as meaning originality but as being without historical analogy, and having relevance to political activity and living globally together. There is excitement and hope at the thought that in Gorbachev a leading politician is accepting the insights of the new thinking and demonstrating his resolve to draw the political conclusions from it. This represents a new grasp of the situation in the two senses of understanding its implications and acting accordingly. With the leading power of the socialist states of Eastern Europe opening up in this way to the new thinking, a

[1] *Neues Deutschland*, organ of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party, 4 October 1985, 2.
[2] *ND*, 17 February 1987.
[3] *ND*, 4 October 1985, 2, and 17 February 1987.

consensus between East and West in political thought — even perhaps a worldwide consensus — in grasping and tackling the situation today seems a possibility, cutting across ideological contrasts. We might end up with a recognition of a common guiding principle for leadership, a categorical imperative for all future politics: "act in such a way that the effects intended and the foreseeable consequences of your acting will not endanger the survival of all humanity".

This is the guiding principle too behind *Der Streit der Ideologien und die gemeinsame Sicherheit* ("The Conflict of Ideologies and Common Security"), the joint declaration of the SPD (Social Democratic Party) committee on fundamental values and the Academy of Social Sciences in the Central Committee of the SED (Socialist Unity Party). Its opening sentence runs as follows:

> The new situation in world history is that humanity can only survive together or perish together. Such an alternative is unparalleled in history. It demands political thinking which is similarly unparalleled in history — a fresh approach to international affairs and especially to the safeguarding of peace.[4]

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is opening itself up to the new thinking but this does not necessarily mean that it is abandoning Marxist-Leninist ideology. Nor is it providing belated confirmation of the theory of convergence — not at least in the sense that ideological ties are yielding to a technocratic pragmatism cutting across the boundaries of systems. The new thinking is certainly not to be regarded as pragmatic. It is not by chance that it is called new *thinking*, and that there is talk of having to find a philosophy of life and a new unity of politics and ethics.[5] The guiding principle is responsibility for the common survival of humanity and to this principle the pragmatism of national and international politics must defer. We can speak of convergence only in the sense that opposing ideologies and social systems are subject to the same principle of responsibility for survival and have to come into line with it.

In meeting the new conditions of life in the nuclear age through the new thinking, socialism is confirming the historical character of Marxist thought. It is casting off the dogmatic distortions which misrepresent Marxism as a systematized world-view true regardless of specific situations. Lenin creatively reintrepreted Marxism to give effect to it in one country — industrially backward Czarist Russia — and, similarly, in the new thinking Marxism-Leninism is restating and restructuring itself to meet the radically transformed situation of the nuclear age. Marxism-Leninism can preserve its continuity only by proving itself in its analysis of historical changes and response to them and thus by changing itself.

What can be said theologically about these aspects of the new thinking?

The new thinking has to be met by a theology which is also historical in its thinking. Thus in the GDR we have tried by beginning with the historical God of the biblical tradition to understand socialism historically and consequently as capable of change. We have pleaded for an "improvable socialism" that cooperatively accepts new historical challenges — as against a dogmatic Marxist world-view, but also as against an anti-communism which contrariwise can see nothing in Marxism beyond this very dogmatism.[6] Now the new thinking is a challenge in turn to theology to

[4] *ND*, 28 August 1987, 3.
[5] *ND*, 17 February 1987.
[6] Cf. H. Falcke, *Mit Gott schritten halten*, Berlin, Wichernverlag, 1986, 24.

recognize and use the moment — the kairos. Have we really moved into the nuclear age theologically? Have we already thought out what it means for the Christian doctrines of God, creation and eschatology to have the responsibility for survival placed in the hands of human beings? This really is the "world come of age" foreseen by Bonhoeffer and now present in all the gravity of its finality. Bonhoeffer began to draw conclusions about what this world come of age would mean for theology and more thought would have to be given to these. The possibilities of a nuclear holocaust represents just as radical a challenge to theology as did the holocaust of Auschwitz. Have we already responded in theological and church ecumenical terms to the new situation of an interdependent world? The line taken in the study "Unity of the Church — Unity of Humanity" and the barriers in church politics encountered by the project of the conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation show how hard this is for the churches.[7] Theologically, the churches would have to treat what is called *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the new thinking as the kairos of conversion (*metanoia*).

The new thinking must also be met from the standpoint of the theology of creation — in relation to humanity and the biosphere as an interdependent whole and also in respect of the problems of survival. To speak about God is to speak of the whole.[8] In its attestation of its God as creator and Lord of the world, Israel thought of the world and humanity as a unit, and took up their problems in faith. Israel set them in the sphere of responsibility before God and in the light of God's faithfulness and promises. The biblical story of creation portrays the one humanity torn by a multitude of conflicts, with its continued existence threatened by violence and the chaos it conjures up; and it links together all humanity in the responsibility for survival. The future of creation, which is sustained by God's faithfulness but is internally torn and at odds with itself, remains an open question. The story of the blessing of Abraham speaks as a promise to this open question. It makes a new start with Abraham, but from this beginning the blessing is intended to reach all the nations. This universal promise at the same time involves the Covenant People in a responsibility for humanity.[9] This line is taken up in the New Covenant which is made available to all through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. An early Christian hymn (Col. 1:15-20) envisages the wholeness or integrity of creation, its future and its peace. The letter to the Ephesians witnesses to Christ as peace, because he both heals humanity in its tornness and closes the gulf between God and human beings, making the church the servant of this unity (Eph. 2:14ff.)

The basis of the idea of unity in the new thinking is in the dual experience of interdependence and the collective threat to survival. But humanity feels itself to be one almost only in the inevitability of its conflicts. It is a convincing postulate that "humanity must at all costs survive" (Gorbachev in Paris, October 1985), but on what basis can it be said with direct insight that this is so? And to what end is humanity to survive — for what future, for what kind of human existence and for what unity? There would have to be a Christian-Marxist dialogue on the aims envisaged in the new thinking, on the reasons for its hope — which are not empirically demonstrable — and on the motivation of the responsibility for survival. A theology of creation inspired by

[7] Cf. K. Raiser, *Einheit der Kirche und Einheit der Menschheit*, er 1986, 1.18ff.
[8] Cf. C. Westermann, *Schöpfung*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Kreuzverlag, 1971.
[9] Cf. H.W. Wolff, "Das Kerygma des Jahwisten", *Ev. Theol.*, 24, 1964, 73-98.

the hope for creation's salvation in Christ would have much to contribute to this dialogue.

Two further questions must be addressed to the new thinking as an approach to humanity's responsibility for human survival in the nuclear age.

For one thing, we must ask whether the situation has been analyzed in sufficient depth. Is there not also a need for a critique of scientific, technological reason? Statements are admittedly made about the urgency of environmental problems, but the roots of these have not, it seems, been adequately laid bare. To do so would require a critique of the objectivizing and instrumental thinking which determines how modern science handles nature. It will also be necessary to check whether the serious pressures of economic requirements leave enough scope for responsibility towards the environment.

Then finally there will be the crucial question, whether global political responsibility for survival will be able to assert itself over short-term economic and political interests. As has often been said, the new thinking in addition to its global objectives also has the short-term internal political aim of social and economic reforms. It is certainly wrong to interpret the former simply as packaging — ideological propaganda — for the latter. Rather, the external and internal political sides are complementary. Nevertheless we must allow for the danger that in the conflict of interests the national economic interest will claim precedence over the prime rational necessity of universal survival and relegate it to the background. It will fall to the church, guided by responsibility for creation and sustained by the unity of humanity given and promised in Christ, to assert this prior claim of global responsibility for survival.

2. The new thinking and the dogma of the class struggle

The problem of the common survival of humanity which is present in the new thinking changes the emphasis placed on the dogma of the class struggle. Humanity's task is such that the dialectic of common and opposite features in the conflicting ideologies must be shaped into a process helpful to survival.

In Paris in October 1985 Gorbachev said:

> Hamlet's well-known question, "To be or not to be?" is becoming a problem for the entire world. There can be only one answer to it: humanity, civilization must survive at all costs. But that can be ensured only if we learn to live with each other and get along well with each other on this small planet — only if we learn to master the art — which is not a simple one — of taking into account each other's interests. This is what we call a policy of peaceful co-existence.[10]

> The time has come when we must learn to master the great art of living with each other, faced as we are with the danger of general nuclear death.[11]

"Living with each other" is a peace programme which implies partnership and cooperation. It includes relinquishing the desire to instruct the world in the name of a sole claim to hold the truth.

> People and nations arrive at any philosophy themselves by agonizing over it and grasping it with heart and mind.
>
> Each country and people has its own truth, its own national interests and its own sought-after desires.[12]

[10] *ND*, 4 October 1985, 1.
[11] *ND*, 22 November 1985, 3.
[12] *ND*, 4 October 1985, 2, and 17 February 1987.

Likewise this living with one another includes the renunciation of any claim to dominate the world.

> Neither the USSR nor the USA will succeed in dictating to the world.[13]

The presupposition in this is that a readiness for peace exists in principle on the other side. That has been mentioned both in Gorbachev's programmatic speech on the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution and in the SPD and SED document. This is the only possible way of abandoning the peace-endangering thesis that only once socialism has triumphed over capitalism and superseded it — or the other way round — will peace be realized. That would be an Eastern or Western variety of the old *pax romana* model.

The doctrine of peaceful co-existence has already existed since Lenin's day. But the novelty of the new thinking lies in the fact that the doctrine of peaceful co-existence is now no longer part of the doctrine of the class struggle, describing merely the method by which the class conflict is conducted. Now peaceful co-existence is derived directly from the higher principle of common responsibility for survival, as the quotation above indicates.

This change has led to uncertainties and debates within the party. These have focused first and foremost on whether readiness for peace can in principle be attributed to capitalism/imperialism. To assert that it can must be unsettling above all where one's own socialist identity is sought and found by contrasting it with capitalism and distancing oneself from it. There has for long been an awareness that images of the enemy contribute to the internal stability and sense of identity of a group. So it is no accident that a discussion arose on this point in *Neues Deutschland*, the official SED party organ. Kurt Hager emended the thesis that imperialism was ready for peace: "So imperialism must be made ready for peace; there is no question of its being naturally so."[14] It was possible to see that alongside the policy of openness transcending the two systems there was also a growing tendency to demarcation of their bounds. The statement by both E. Honecker and H. Kohl, that in relation to each other capitalism and socialism were like fire and water, was frequently repeated, with recognizable satisfaction and relief.

Here the new thinking conflicts with the need for identity, which in the doctrine of the class struggle is defined in terms of opposition to capitalism. The new thinking can make headway only with difficulty when caught in the current of this sense of identity. Then the dialectic of the common and opposing features in the ideological systems becomes a makeshift, and veers back and forward between cooperation and the definition of one's own identity — between openness and lines of demarcation; and the world-historical challenge of responsibility for survival is felt to be a threat. But this makes the danger acute that people will remain prisoners of old patterns of thought or fall back into them.

Something else may be noted in Gorbachev's analysis of capitalism in his speech on the seventieth anniversary of the October revolution. His starting point is the task of the peace policy to give political reality to the idea of common security. With his eyes on this task, he asks what reasons there actually are for the optimistic idea of

[13] *ND*, 16 July 1986.
[14] *ND*, 28 October 1987, 3.

being able to have a programme of common security with capitalism. Having put the question in this way, he goes on to analyze present-day capitalism empirically and produces three results: capitalism too can be guided by the laws governing an inter-dependent world in the rational cause of survival and is therefore a suitable partner in a coalition against a holocaust, just as it was in a coalition against Hitler; it can break loose from militarism; and it can get along without neo-colonialism.[15] The ideological openness of this astonishingly optimistic analysis is impressive. One might almost ask whether it is optimism with a purpose, deriving from political reason — which is prompted by the responsibility for survival — or whether this rationality has to struggle against the prejudices of the class struggle within its own ranks.

What matters here is that the governing factor is not anxiety about identity but global responsibility for survival. For its part, this will lead to a transformation of identity in the light of the new statement of the task. It will be a challenge to find an identity. The focus will not be on yesterday's images of the enemy but on the image of the new humanity coping with the new task. The human virtues will be creativity, openness, readiness for cooperation and an ability to cope with conflict, and empathy.

Then "competition between the systems" will not take the form of a theatre in which each side displays its own moral superiority, but a field of work in which cooperation will be practised in the interest of common survival. Thus the document on ideology pointedly makes cooperation itself the content of competition and talks about "competition in cooperation".[16] The dialectic of common and opposing features then becomes a productive process in which each side helps the other to become capable of peace, for readiness for peace is something which develops and has its locus in relations; it is not the inner quality of an "essence" or "nature", definable in isolation. To that extent the question whether communism or capitalism is intrinsically ready for peace or is made so under external pressure poses a false alternative. Readiness for peace develops in relations which awaken and promote it. This is the basic insight underlying the programme for common security to which we now turn.

How do Protestant theology and the Protestant church react to this aspect of the new thinking?

Here the starting point is universal reconciliation in Christ. Intrinsically this is God's love of the enemy. It becomes a radical assault on thinking in terms of demarcation lines and friend-foe paradigms. In social ethics it is concretely expressed in love for the enemy which aims to be a love that does away with having enemies. It becomes critically effective in the constant — and constantly necessary — dismantling of prejudices and images of the enemy. It has a positive effect in the upbuilding of a world of brothers and sisters in solidarity.

Reconciliation in Christ also brings freedom from anxiety about one's identity. This is shown above all by the Pauline message of justification with its criticism of the self-righteousness that takes its stand on the law and on works. The new human being finds his or her identity not by boastful comparison of themselves with others and with those who are different, but from Christ, the new man, whose followers they are and to whom they are conformed.

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[15] *ND*, 3 November 1987, 6.
[16] *ND*, 28 August 1987, 3.

We have already said that Christian-Marxist dialogue on the new thinking must begin with an open question: What does it consider to be the objective of a unified humanity? It must begin too with the basis for its hope, which is not empirically demonstrable, and with the motivation of responsibility for survival. The discussion outlined above reveals elements of resistance to the new thinking which can scarcely be overcome by the rational calculation that this unity is necessary if humanity is to survive. For this *ratio* comes up against anxieties, emotions and ties which call for liberation and renewal — whereas the new thinking by itself and without the renewal of the whole person would remain an oddly idealistic, intellectualist, theologically spiritualizing programme.[17] Here we see the relevance of the reality and power of the liberation and reconciliation represented by the cross and resurrection of Christ. This spirit of renewal and reconciliation is attested in the New Testament as the Creator Spirit which calls into being the new humanity. Is any special proof necessary that frequently, as Christians and churches, we are the very ones who turn out to be more in need of this spirit than able to use it? And do we not meet outside the church, e.g. in the new thinking, a power of renewal in which we recognize something of the working of this Spirit, which as the Bible testifies does in fact operate outside the church too, as the Creator Spirit in creation? At all events the Holy Spirit of total renewal, attested by the New Testament, turns out to be the most intimate friend of the new thinking.

3. Effective political responsibility for common survival in the peace policy of common security

Does the partnership for security take the form of cooperation for a just international economic order in support of those who are economically weak? On the basis of biblical *shalom*, that must be the guiding principle of this political responsibility. Otherwise it will degenerate into a conspiracy of the rich and strong for security against the weak and dependent. Gorbachev has repeatedly expounded the fundamental idea behind the project of common security.

The "comprehensive system of international security... is a system based on the principle that one's own security must not be built up at the expense of the other — it is a system in which the main fields, military, political, economic and humanitarian, are organically united".[18]

This system is seen as an alternative to the system of deterrence, with its "logic" based on a "policy of intimidation".[19] Just as the doctrine of deterrence puts its mark as a system on the whole of society, so too the system of common security must be seen as a global project. In military terms it means disarmament as regards nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and conventional rearmament for defensive strategies and weapons. Politically it means treaties and confidence-building. Economically it means international interaction and educationally the dismantling of images of the enemy, education for peace, and understanding among the nations.

Since 1982 the Synod of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR has repeatedly expressed its "renunciation of the spirit, logic and practice of deterrence"

[17] I.e. Not related to revelation in history (translator's note).
[18] *ND*, 17 February 1987.
[19] *Ibid.*

and has recommended the project of partnership for security as a peace policy alternative. This finds its political counterpart in the new thinking and in the peace policy of the GDR too. In September 1987 the Synod declared that military readiness for defence remained justifiable only if governed not by the deterrence system but unambiguously by the project of common security. Participation in military defence must therefore be weighed against whether it "contributes to reducing and preventing violence and to the building of an international order of peace and justice" and how it does so. Refusal of military service is in this context a symbolic action which serves to underline that violence as such and the human tendency to violence must be overcome, that political implementation of the project of common security is indispensable and urgent in all its dimensions and that in politics non-violent ways of creating peace must be found and pursued.

The church, however, will also have to make it clear that a peace policy must show itself to be in line with the principle of justice. Reconciliation in the East-West conflict must not become a mutual guarantee of security for the powerful without regard for the weak and the dependent. In the prophetic tradition the *shalom* and therefore the well-being of the poor, the powerless and the dependent is the crucial criterion for the *shalom* of a people and a state. The reign of Caesar Augustus was celebrated by political writers as the golden age of the *pax romana*.[20] But the angels did not proclaim peace over the Forum romanum, but above the shepherds, the poorest of the poor in one of the imperial provinces, and over the birth of a child in an eastern inn. Thus, to be a theology of *shalom*, the theology of peace must be able to hold its own with the principles of a theology of liberation.

Gorbachev has repeatedly stressed that his programme is "disarmament for development".

> Justice demands... a control of international economic activity which would exclude the poor's being robbed by the rich. Can we really rest content in a world where three quarters of the countries are burdened with debts they cannot pay but a little cluster of states occupies the stage as all-powerful profiteers? Latent in this situation is the material for a social explosion which can also destroy modern civilization.[21]

It remains to be seen how far this guiding principle of justice can actually be implemented, for the simple reason that behind the Soviet disarmament policy there are powerful internal economic necessities and interests.

4. The indivisibility of foreign policy related to global responsibility and internal political restructuring for greater political participation

Gorbachev has repeatedly stressed this connection, developing it especially in two respects. One is more pragmatic: the Soviet Union needs peace for its internal restructuring. The other is more fundamentally political: in line with the need of Soviet society for more responsible political *participation* by the citizens themselves, it is also necessary to learn to develop political responsibility in a global perspective. The new thinking implied must indeed be conceived and put into practice not just by an elite but by as many as possible, if humanity is to survive.

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[20] Cf. Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana*, Munich, Kaiser, 1986.
[21] *ND*, 17 February 1987.

In his speech on the 70th anniversary of the October revolution Gorbachev stated:

> The changes going on among us are perhaps the greatest step on the road to the development of socialist democracy since the Revolution. In restructuring our economic and political system we have a duty to do two things: first, to create a reliable, flexible mechanism to involve the entire working population in the solution of state and social problems, and secondly to teach people practically how to live in a more fully developing democracy, to extend and consolidate human rights and to advance the current political culture of the masses — in other words to teach democracy and to learn it.
>
> And now we can see how difficult it is for people to accustom themselves to the new situation, to the opportunity and the need to solve all the questions in life by democratic methods. Many have long been "timid"; they proceed cautiously, fearing responsibility, and are still under the spell of outdated rules and regulations. The task is to awaken in people a taste for independence and responsibility in dealing with matters relating to production and society, whatever their scope, and to develop self-government as a power of the people which will be exercised by the people and in the interests of the people.
>
> What becomes of the most important task of the moment... does not depend only on the politicians. And we are living witnesses to how a powerful social movement is forming and expanding with the participation throughout the world of scientists, intellectuals of various disciplines, religious dignitaries, women, young people and children — children more and more (!) — and even former generals among the military, who have first-hand knowledge of what modern weapons mean. And all this is because people are recognizing more profoundly the situation into which the world has got itself, the precipice which it has come to and the reality of the danger that threatens it.[22]

In a panel discussion in Mainz in November 1987 a Soviet historian from Moscow rightly said that *glasnost* and *perestroika* are not just a Soviet problem but a global one. It would in fact be extremely superficial to think of restructuring as meaning that socialism in its present form is now seeking to bring in, as a necessity, what the West has long had — freedom of the press, public debate and individual human rights. What is intended rather at the deepest level is the process of social and individual education necessary for growth in responsibility for the world — that is the task facing this and coming generations as it has faced none in the past. But we cannot expect activation of personal, free political responsibility as a *result* of the educational process if nothing is done *now* to facilitate and promote it. It is possible that Gorbachev has learned this lesson from the development of Soviet society since 1917. The changes human beings are challenged to make because of the present world situation relate both to the structures and the heart of our personal approach to life. Nothing less than a revolution in values is at hand, but this must take place *within* individuals: It is not just our heads or our hands that have to learn but our consciences.

There is impressive testimony to this in an essay by a Soviet teacher:

> Now when we can see how small our planet is and how near we are to each other — so that we can reach each other in just a few minutes — the old ideas of patriotism and national consciousness no longer hold good. It is not possible to love our homeland, "our own folk", if we sit behind high fences looking anxiously at strangers through narrow slits. Even the idea of "ours" and "theirs" changes radically. Today and, let us hope, for ever, patriotic education means the education of a person who loves his homeland as part of the world and loves the whole world as his homeland. Being a citizen does not mean digging a pit for

[22] *ND*, 3 November 1987, 5, and 17 February 1987.

> others to fall into, nor prophesying their inevitable destruction, but means rather having done with the ambitions and aspirations of a grave-digger. Being a citizen means adding to the warmth and love in the world and being capable of compassion, sympathy, trust and understanding.[23]

For this educational process individuals need freedom, the open exchange of opinions, scope for their individuality to develop and opportunities for participation. Here the guiding principle is neither the old, formal liberal ideal of freedom nor the modern ideal of self-realization. Rather it is common political responsibility for the future. This needs the help of everyone — not only men, but as a matter of course also women and children, and it must enable everyone to *make their own contribution*. *Perestroika* and *glasnost* in this sense really are a global problem, posed differently perhaps in different societies, but present in all of them.

Anthropologically, restructuring in this sense enters the dimension of biblical conversion. It would be up to the churches to respond to the new thinking, which also regards itself as rethinking, with a rediscovery of the biblical message of conversion (and this would be much more important than saying what *perestroika* and *glasnost* mean for the churches in terms of tolerance and freedom of movement). The preaching of conversion by the prophets and by Jesus has been individualized and psychologized in the Western Christian tradition. This is true of both the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance and Protestant confessional practice and pietistic devotional conversion. In the new thinking we find a political conception of conversion which takes cognizance of history and is related to the world, and which in its radical nature also relates to individuals and their inmost selves in a new way. This idea of conversion has been secularized, but, in its relevance to the historical moment (the kairos), to public affairs and politics, and in the fact that it speaks to the people and to those who carry responsibility, it contains elements of the biblical message of conversion which have been lost in the Western Christian tradition. The churches would have a genuine locus, which in fact belongs to their mission, for their encounter with the new thinking, if they were to regain the comprehensive scope of biblical conversion and put it into practice in witness, in service and in their own life-style. This is the direction in which they are called by the Vancouver Assembly. The churches should come together into a covenant for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. This call and the new thinking show a surprisingly broad and deep convergence, which is in itself an encouragement to the churches not to be ashamed of the gospel of conversion — a conversion which opens up the future and life itself.

[23] Ludmila Saraskina, "Was die Kinder spielen", *Das XX. Jahrhundert und der Frieden* 5/87, 20ff.

Justification by Grace and Liberation Theology: a Comparison

Gottfried Brakemeier

The rise of liberation theology

If evangelical preaching is really to be good news for the poor (cf. Matt. 11:5; Luke 4:18), what must its message be? This question cannot be avoided in Latin America. Some 80 percent of the population is living at subsistence level or below — in a continent with a superfluity of natural resources. An unparallelled process of impoverishment, clearly not yet at an end, has resulted from foreign debt and economic dependence and likewise from grossly unjust distribution of income, concentration of the land in the hands of a few, and economic mismanagement. There has consequently been a dramatic increase in violence, an enormous amount of internal migration, high infant mortality, child-exposure, and unemployment — in short, hunger, poverty and death. What do salvation, the gospel and the Christian mission mean in such circumstances?

At the very latest since the Episcopal Conference at Medellín, Colombia, in 1968, it was clear to large groups in Catholicism (and meanwhile in Protestantism as well) that, in face of the distress in Latin America, it is the church's task to campaign for the liberation of the oppressed. The gospel is not neutral. God takes the side of the poor, liberates from all distress. The theology of liberation developed on this basis is a contextual theology profoundly conscious of its responsibility to deal with the realities of the situation. It sees itself as "reflection on praxis in the light of the gospel". At its heart is the discovery that poverty, ignorance and oppression have structural causes and must therefore be dealt with effectively at the political level.

What is needed, therefore, is that the people should become aware of their situation and claim their rights. What the gospel seeks is justice, an end to tyranny, and human

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freedom; its goal is the establishment of the kingdom of God. The emphasis of liberation theology, therefore, is on praxis, and the need for solidarity with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation. The gospel commits us to the "option in favour of the poor". At the same time liberation theology denounces the "ideologies" which conceal the maintenance of class privileges. The results are visible in those thousands of basic or grassroots communities in which a profound spirituality is combined with social and political commitment.

Although liberation theology quite deliberately accepts the political dimension of the Christian faith, it has in mind something more than social action. The gospel liberates the *whole* human being; it sets people free not only from unjust structures but also from the power of sin, human egotism and the tyranny of death. It is for this reason, if for no other, that Bible reading, prayer, and the credal confession of faith are of such importance in the grassroots groups. In other words, the poor and the oppressed are offered a gospel which is more than comfort and healing for the soul, but is also more than mere social improvement. This gospel is the promise of a real change in the situation, a new deliverance from Egypt, a new exodus.

Clearly the response to liberation theology among those who defend the *status quo* is not exactly one of sympathy. It is a matter of controversy even in the Catholic Church itself. It attacks the interests and privileges of the dominant classes and raises critical questions within the churches, challenging not least the Protestant churches, their theology and their congregational life. In our reactions we should guard against cheap polemics. Any answer which ignores the reality of poverty and injustice is wide off the mark. But we do have to ask about the meaning of justification by grace through faith — the main article of faith in the Reformation churches — in the Latin American situation.

The meaning of justification by faith

To preach justification is to bear witness to the mercy of God in accepting sinners, pardoning their guilt and restoring to them the dignity of the children of God. This is what the term "the righteousness (justice) of God" (Rom. 1:17; 3:21; *et frequenter*) signifies: not the justice by which God avenges sin through punishment, but the righteousness God bestows on human beings by justifying them and taking them back into fellowship with God. God is just in his justification of sinners (Rom. 3:26) and is so, moreover, through Jesus Christ the Crucified, the sign and proof of God's love towards the fallen world.

It is a mistake to imagine that the message of justification rests exclusively on the testimony of Paul. Even though the corresponding terminology is largely missing in the gospel accounts, Jesus' words and deeds were wholly bent on the justification of the sinner. He is the mediator of God's unmerited grace, as his fellowship with tax collectors and sinners shows. One of the most impressive presentations of justification through grace alone is the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11ff.).The kingdom of God, the nearness of which is proclaimed by Jesus (Mark 1:15), is itself nothing other than the justification of the sinner and the restoration of humanity to subjection to the exclusive sovereignty of God. Justification, then, is God's active love, bestowing aid without questions as to worthiness and merit. It puts in a claim for the right to be gracious (Matt. 20:1f.), and to be merciful even when the whole world condemns (Luke 19:1ff.). The truth is that in the presence of God nothing can

be taken by force. What God gives is given out of pure grace: life, its blessings, forgiveness, help, everything. In "return" God expects simply our thankful acceptance of the divine gifts, our respect for God's rights as Creator, our trust not in our own human capacities but in God's strength which is demonstrated mightily in our weakness.

What comes into being as a result of justification, therefore, is a new humanity, which can thank and praise God and trust in God more than in all else. The result of justification is the church, the assembly of redeemed sinners, the body of Christ. The result of justification is, finally, the obligation to live a new life in the combat with sin, in love to the neighbour, and in the constant attempt to practise the service of God in this world — until the day when faith is permitted to see, no longer in a mirror darkly, but "face to face" (1 Cor. 12:12), at the resurrection of the dead and the coming of God's kingdom in all its power and glory.

On the basis of what has been said above, we might be tempted to conclude that whereas justification by faith through grace is good news for sinners, the message of liberation is the true gospel for the poor. Martin Luther asked: How do I (as a sinner) find a gracious God? Liberation theology asks: How do we (the poor) find a just world? In both instances we can appeal to the witness of the Bible.

In the case of Jesus we find side by side the blessing pronounced on the poor and the search for the lost. The parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus, which speaks of the deliverance of the poor man, stands alongside the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the theme of which is the deliverance of the sinner (Luke 16:19ff.; 18:9ff.).

Liberation and justification: how they are related

What then is the relationship in the gospel between sin and poverty, justification and liberation, God's grace and humanity's task?

1. I find it impossible to speak of liberation theology without thinking at the same time of what we can learn from it. A sheer confrontation between two rigid positions is hardly likely to be very fruitful. Moreover, in the theology of liberation and the theology of justification we are dealing with extremely complex phenomena which appear in widely different forms and cut right across all the traditional confessional boundaries. All that can be compared, therefore, are a few broad salient features and tendencies.

2. It is to liberation theology's credit that it reminds us that justice is what God requires of us; justice moreover in the quite basic sense of the recognition and securing of another's rights, as the sharing and fair distribution of material and other blessings. In this sense, justice is both a political concept and yet at the same time a profoundly biblical concept. The Old Testament prophets called for justice in the form of the championing of the cause of the weak and the poor, the widows and orphans, the defence of their rights. Jesus promises that those who hunger and thirst for justice shall be satisfied (Matt. 5:6). Finally, justice will be the characteristic of the new heaven and the new earth to which the Christian looks forward in the coming consummation (2 Pet. 3:13). What therefore is the connection between justification and the struggle for justice in this world? Two observations are called for here:

a) Justification does not deprive a human being of what is his or her due. On the contrary, it gives him what he or she does not deserve (cf. Matt. 20:1ff.). God's grace always gives more than what we are entitled to, never less. In other words, the

legitimate rights of the human being are never ignored in justification. On the contrary, it is the basis of the need to protect and respect those rights.

b) Justification carries with it an obligation. It requires to be accepted in faith and to be demonstrated in the practice of that same mercy which the justified person has experienced at the hand of God (cf. Matt. 18:23ff.). Mercy and love will, of course, always be more than mere distributive justice, but, as already said, never less than that. Love takes no delight in injustice. It wants to see that which God has given freely to all beings respected as a right.

According to the biblical witness, *freedom* is the outcome of justification. So it is not by chance that the Reformation of the sixteenth century was a great liberation movement. Has this aspect of the gospel been lost? This is where liberation theology puts its question: when the church speaks of evangelical freedom, can it ignore structures which enslave human beings and oppress them politically, economically and culturally? Liberation theology notes that sin is not something concerning only the individual but also leaves its traces in laws and structures which are incompatible with the gospel. Evangelical freedom, liberation theology insists, must be concrete, and that means, not least, political, just as salvation as such must be concrete and include the physical material needs of the human being.

Thus the Protestant church is challenged to abandon a narrow individualistic view of justification and to rediscover the social implications of the gospel. Justification by grace becomes excitingly relevant when we discover that the law from which it liberates us embraces also the social structures which determine our lives.

3. Lutheran tradition has never denied the political task of the Christian. In social structures and in the authority of the state it has recognized the beneficent ordinances for the maintenance of creation. In its concern for the common weal the state fulfills a divine mandate in which the Christian can do no other than recognize a form of God's gracious rule. The civil power can of course be corrupt and promote injustice rather than justice, and where this happens the Lutheran tradition has clearly said that we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29; cf. Augsburg Confession 16).

Among the Protestants (including the Lutherans) of Latin America, however, we find in fact a curious reticence in political matters. To be sure, there must be no confusion between politics and religion. They are not one and the same thing. On the other hand, neither must there be any divorce between them. Unconditional submission to the established civil authorities at any given time directly contradicts the priority of obedience to God over against all forms of obedience to rulers. The renunciation of political responsibility also hampers the fulfilment of the commandment to love the neighbour and signifies culpable indifference to the preservation of God's creation. The kind of faith which evades political responsibility thereby denies God the Creator, withholds love from the neighbour and from the state that cooperation which it needs even if it would prefer to do without it. The modern state cannot function without the active cooperation of its citizens. Liberation theology reminds the church of this task.

4. The gospel demands faith, not an effort to obtain salvation through works of merit. But does this mean that Christians can fold their arms and consider themselves dispensed from all activity? Pushing it a bit, one could say that in our churches a real allergy has developed to all that could even remotely smack of "works". As already

shown, this is a crude misunderstanding of justification, one which the apostle Paul attacked in Romans 7.

By its strict emphasis on praxis, liberation theology exposes a long-standing deficiency in our churches. Faith is not limited to emotion, knowledge or conviction. Faith means life. It works by love (Gal. 5:6). The grace received from God is to be passed on and lived out. And this means, too, that Christians recognize that it is necessary for them to oppose lovelessness in our society, to protest against the crimes inflicted on God's creation and against the injustice done to the poor and defenceless. They have an obligation to identify and condemn sin and to champion the victims of society. What is required of those who have been justified by grace and faith is not the works of the law but certainly the works of love.

Liberation theology emphatically reminds the churches of the realities of Latin America and of neglected aspects of Christian practice. As a theological movement it is to be taken very seriously, not least in those respects which prompt critical questions from our side, in the light of our Protestant tradition.

An evangelical critique of liberation

1. In the first place, we must look again at the relationship between the gospel and politics. Whereas in the traditionalist churches the political dimension of the Christian faith is either underdeveloped or completely left out of account, in liberation theology it is assigned a priority which in some cases borders on exclusivity. Evil is seen as a product of structures. In particular evil has taken shape in the capitalist system and demonstrates its reality in a society dominated by conflicting interests and the class struggle. Evil, in other words, is felt to be essentially a political problem which is also to be dealt with politically, i.e. by a strategy, consciousness-raising and the organization of the people. Liberation thus becomes a programme which is to be implemented by the oppressed classes, the goal of which is the elimination of every form of external tyranny and the creation of a just and worthy human society.

Our question is whether the definition of evil mainly in political terms does not deprive evil of its real sting. If such social evils as exploitation and oppression were only structural and political in character, they would in fact be a merely technical matter which could in principle be removed by human efforts. The structural aspects of evil are, clearly, incontestable and must be tackled with energy, but it must be asked whether in liberation theology enough attention is paid to the character of evil as a power. Is not evil overcome solely by the Spirit of God?

If it is dangerous for the one side to deny the political dimension of faith, it is also dangerous for the other side to exaggerate its importance. For when everything is made to depend on political action, God in the last analysis becomes redundant. Preaching will then consist wholly of imperatives, accusations or attacks, and there is a danger of a frustration arising from experience of human limitations which are also inherent in political endeavour.

Certainly the forms of liberation theology to which reference is made here are of an extremist kind. But they are very much alive in our midst and themselves also pose the question of defining the true relationship between politics and the gospel.

Political action in our view has its place in Christian ethics, not in soteriology. Political action in favour of justice and the common weal is indeed one of the urgent tasks assigned to Christians. By it the world can be improved, human life can be saved

and destruction can be prevented. Yet salvation is not to be procured in this way, since human action never gets beyond the effort to appropriate for ourselves the salvation which is already available in Christ. Though inextricably interconnected, human salvation and human wellbeing are to be distinguished. Salvation without wellbeing is assuredly diminished and scarcely even imaginable. Nevertheless prosperity is very far indeed from having the sense of salvation.

2. How then are we to envisage the relation between gospel and liberation? The majority of liberation theologians are by no means prisoners of the political perspective. As we have already pointed out, what they have in view is complete liberation, including victory over selfishness and lovelessness, unbelief and death. Yet if that be so, does not liberation presuppose justification by grace through faith? How else are we delivered from selfishness than through the forgiveness of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit who renews us wholly and teaches us to seek what is of God and not what is of human origin (cf. Mark 8:33)?

This is why preaching and conversion for all are necessary. Freedom is not simply to be won by struggle, it has to be bestowed on human beings. For evangelical freedom is in essence not only "freedom from", i.e. emancipation and independence. It is fundamentally "freedom for", i.e. readiness and capacity to accept obligations in relation to God and our fellow human beings. But this freedom results only from the preaching and the acceptance of the love of God which welcomes the sinner, does not decide on merit, and is stronger than death. Without justification through grace accepted in faith, therefore, we shall certainly be able to offer the poor our political programmes (and this is in no way to be disdained) but *not* full and complete liberation.

3. The third question concerns the relation between the gospel and the church. Liberation theology uses the term "people" frequently and as a key concept. It defines it in two ways. "People" means firstly the mass of the marginalized, the exploited and the poor. Here, therefore, it is a sociological category. At the same time, however, "people" is a synonym for church. It is that part of society with which God has entered into solidarity and which therefore is the bearer of the promise. Seen in this way, "people" is a theological term. Although a few liberation theologians make it very clear that faith is also required of the poor, church and people are usually equated even if this equation is mostly implicit rather than explicit. This makes it possible for liberation theology to transfer in practice all the attributes of the church to the people. The people is the church and solidarity with the poor is evidence of belonging to the church.

Difficulties arise here for a Protestant church, both practically and theologically. To take the practical difficulties first. Despite differences of social origin and background among our church members, there is a predominance of middle-class people. In other words, our church is not "people" in the sense indicated above, at any rate the majority of them. In the judgment of pastors who sympathize with liberation theology, we therefore have spurious membership. There is a readiness to work with the people but not with the traditional church member. The conflict which erupts here in our church takes the form of the supposed choice between the so-called "service ministry" and the "ministry of solidarity", i.e. a pastoral office which lives in a direct identification with the people. No solution to this problem is yet on the horizon.

If the practical difficulties are serious, the theological ones are no less so. An evangelical church interprets itself more in terms of what it receives than in terms of what it has or is. It lives by the grace of God, renewed each day. Its primary emphasis is not on the "Christ *with* us", i.e. the Christ who stands beside us, but in the "Christ *for* us", i.e. the Christ who sacrificed himself for us. The church depends on the word and sacrament of its Lord. It depends constantly on the grace which is truly received only where we submit ourselves to God's judgment. For Christ the Crucified does not save, does not identify himself in solidarity with anyone, without at the same time judging. There is a fundamental solidarity of all in sin. This solidarity is the basis on which the undeserved grace of God builds the community as a fellowship of graced sinners. All liberation must pass by way of the judgment of the cross of Christ.

One of the consequences of this is the merely relative character of the differentiation between the oppressed and the oppressors. There is a sense in which this differentiation is justified. There *are* oppressors; they exist internationally as well as at the national or personal levels. Yet this differentiation must never be taken to mean the classification of human beings into sinners and righteous. All would be lost in that case. The church would then form a social class, a political party, or a pressure group. It is the offence of the gospel that Jesus Christ radically takes up the cause of sinners and then the poor among these.

In other words, God creates God's community out of unworthy and sinful human beings, not out of those who constitute one and the same social class. All, however, are at once placed in the service of the weak and the needy. It is faith which constitutes the church, the faith which accepts the free justification of the sinner in Christ and insists on this truth. But one of the most fundamental forms in which this faith will find expression is the love which passes on the grace received and introduces it as a critical factor into a world to which grace is unknown and which has succumbed in a terrifying degree to the "law of works", to the law of merit, the law of productivity and profitability. The task of the church is to practise a new fellowship, a fellowship of the unequal yet equal, constantly seeking to overcome the antagonisms of society. This is certainly no easy task. Yet it alone offers the possibility of really being a Christian community.

The gospel for Latin America

What is the gospel message for Latin America? There is only one message, the message of the God who "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Love is the only thing that can provide the basis for deliverance and hope — even in Latin America. Let me try to explain why.

1. In God's love, i.e. in grace, is the salvation of the world, for the two following reasons:

a) God's justifying grace confers on human beings the right to exist, even though they seem redundant and have no "works" (achievements) to which they can point. All for whom society has no room remain God's creatures for whom Christ died on the cross. None of us is forgotten by God. In God's sight a human being does not become worthless when he or she passes life's halfway mark, or is a customer without purchasing power. All are God's children — the orphan and the criminal, the frustrated person in the lap of luxury and the person starving in penury. They may perhaps not know it; they may have "forgotten" it. At all events, this is the truth the

church has to broadcast to the four winds as comfort, as a call to repentance, as judgment.

b) God's justifying grace establishes new criteria of conduct. What counts in God's sight is not importance, glory and fame but love towards those who suffer. Love here is not to be understood in any sentimental sense. Christian love is more a matter of will than of emotion. What matters is what we purpose. So the gospel puts to us the question: what is it that love wants for Latin America? Can there be any doubt about the answer? Surely what love wants for Latin America is that it should, that it must, strive for justice, for the changing of structures, for liberation from the yoke of dependencies, and for bread instead of armaments. Love must be a thinking love, and political and economic reflection must be guided by love; otherwise it is utterly vain (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1ff.).

The gospel of the justification of the sinner liberates us for this love. It does not present this love merely as a demand but actually makes this love possible. The task of the church, therefore, is not just to preach love as God's commandment. By its words and deeds, the church must make men and women capable of love, the love without which the world can only perish.

2. In God's love, i.e. in God's grace, the hope for the world is also rooted and grounded, for:

a) The love of our heavenly Father still remains real even if the world were to be the victim of nuclear or ecological disaster. It remains real, too, for the millions who die of starvation or terrible diseases, or who are the victims of violence. For death cannot separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:30ff.). Hope remains even if the world perishes because of its own crimes, its own lunacies, or even its own creaturely limitations. It is hope of the resurrection. It opens up a future even when, humanly speaking, there is no longer any future.

Faith thereby challenges, not least, that strange "immanentism" which limits reality to what is demonstrable and which must therefore accept death as the final authority and make this life the only possible setting for the fulfilment of all human longings. The inevitable result is a religion of "self-realization", the ruthless pursuit of happiness at the expense of others, an attitude of complete irresponsibility for any future consequences (*après nous le déluge*) which in turn produces a consumer mentality directly responsible for exploitation and social inequality, for the concentration of property in the hands of a few and for an unprecedented plundering of natural resources. Our world is perishing because it does not believe in the resurrection of the dead and no longer has any hope. It is in desperate need of the message of Easter.

b) The love of God in Jesus Christ signifies hope not least because it is ever reawakening us human beings, opening our eyes and ears to the presence of the poor and needy and suffering. Who will venture to speak up in defence of the exploited? Who is free enough and bold enough to attack publicly the crimes being committed against nature, against nations, against social groups and minorities? Only those who are capable of love. But the gospel confers this capacity. A loveless existence is un-Christian. It is the gospel, therefore, which constrains us to ask (I repeat the question): what is it that love must purpose and achieve in Latin America?

Christian Social Ethics in North America

Roger L. Shinn

The North American scene

Christian social thought and action in North America[1] are notable for energy, variety, conflict — and, often, confusion. Anybody might find evidence to support, and refute, many generalizations. One is especially interesting: two decades ago a Christian "activist" belonged to the liberal left; today the term is as likely to refer to the religious and political right.

To explore that theme requires attention to categories and vocabulary. Common language talks of "mainline" churches and of "evangelicals". I shall use those imprecise terms, putting them in quotation marks to indicate my discontent with them.

"Mainline" churches usually refer to those large denominations that participate in the National Council of Churches (NCC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). There is a touch of presumption in this term, as a self-designation; but it is common enough and I find it occasionally in the writings of Christians who distance themselves from the "mainline". Synods, conferences, and assemblies of "mainline" churches pass long lists of social resolutions quite comparable to those that come out of the WCC.

"Evangelicals", in current usage, are the more conservative churches that usually live outside the ecumenical movement. That designation is confusing in many parts of the world, where "evangelical" refers to churches loyal to the gospel (*evangelion*) or to churches coming out of the Protestant Reformation. Many of us who cherish the ecumenical movement think of ourselves as "liberal evangelicals". But often in the US the term "evangelical" is claimed by fundamentalists and others who, not adhering to the biblical literalism of fundamentalism, uphold a conservative biblical and doctrinal position. Sometimes "evangelicals" are taken to include two wings: the fundamentalist (and near-fundamentalist) and the charismatic. The latter emphasize the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of healing and speaking in tongues. The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) includes 45 member denominations and some

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[1] Most of what I say has to do primarily with the United States. I neglect Canada not (I hope) out of the arrogance that identifies "American" with the United States, but simply because I know the United States better. My limited experience of Canada leads me to think that most of the generalizations I make are true of Canada also. I have no competence to write about Mexico.

45,000 churches from 78 denominations. "Evangelicals" are often highly critical of the "left-leaning" social ethic of "mainline" churches and of the WCC and NCC. Yet some small "evangelical" groups, notably Evangelicals for Social Action, show a lively concern for victims of oppression and militarism.

"Mainline" churches often regard the others as fringe groups. But demographically this has never been the case. The largest Protestant denomination in the US is the Southern Baptist Convention, which is not a member of the NCC or the WCC. In recent years fundamentalists have won majority votes in its national convention. The radio and television preachers who flood the airways are mostly fundamentalists, near-fundamentalists, and charismatics, whose programmes are marked by an authoritarian style, high-pressure attempts to raise money, and right-wing social views.

The "mainline churches" often show a wide gap, well reported by sociologists and journalists, between leaders and members. Politicians get quite different messages from church leaders and from the church folk in their home districts. A few surveys, not very systematic, seem to show that Jewish and Roman Catholic legislators tend to take stands a little closer to the positions of their religious organizations than do Protestants; but the evidence varies with the issue. The divergence between leadership and membership is not unique to North America. I have frequently found a similar distance in churches of Europe and Asia.

Another way to assess the scene is to look at Christian non-denominational journals, especially those that comment regularly on public issues. To read *The Christian Century* and *Christianity and Crisis* is to enter the world of discourse that prevails in the NCC and the WCC. That is almost equally true of *Commonweal*, edited by Roman Catholic lay people, and the Jesuit *America*. Two "evangelical" journals, *Sojourners* and *The Other Side*, speak out of a tradition related to the "sectarian" Protestant Reformation; they are pacifist and aim to address Christian believers rather than the larger society, although both speak out on public issues. On the theological and usually the political right is *Christianity Today*. It has a wider circulation than the sum of the six journals I have mentioned.

Still another approach to the situation is through the Society of Christian Ethics, an organization of professional scholars. Its membership is mostly professors in colleges, universities, and theological seminaries, with a few from denominational staffs. It is largely Protestant, but has very significant Catholic membership, with a small but valued Eastern Orthodox and Jewish participation. On rare occasions, when Christian integrity seems to require a political assertion, it votes resolutions on public issues. But it generally avoids endorsements that would foreclose continuing discussion of controversial issues.

One characteristic of the organization is the increasing specialization that characterizes academia today. Ethicists may concentrate on bio-ethics, economic ethics, political ethics, sexual ethics, racial ethics, comparative religious ethics. Any of these is rich enough to become the centre of a scholarly career. But specialization raises problems for Christian ethics, which seeks a comprehensive vision of life and society.

Many members of the Society are active contributors to the social thought and programmes of their churches. For some, theology is "critical reflection — in the light of the Word accepted in faith — on historical praxis" (Gustavo Gutierrez), and theological ethics therefore requires involvement in church and society. But the critical demands of scholarship may jar with the programmatic desire of churches. And the

desire of churches to rally their forces and influence public policy may conflict with the nuanced analysis of scholars. James Gustafson, one of the most eminent Christian ethicists in America and a devoted church member, writes that he has almost given up looking to the churches for guidance on ethical issues. He accuses them of "simple-minded moralism" and intellectual "flabbiness"; and he charges them with moral certitude "more dogmatic than the opinions and policies of those they passionately oppose."[2] But his criticism is a call for more rigorous work, not for silence. I shall return to this issue later.

An exemplary issue: peace and justice

To examine the processes of Christian social ethics, it is useful to take an example. Many are available. I am here concentrating on the issue of peace and justice in a nuclear age. I select it because it is so critically important and because some analytic comparisons are illuminating.

The document that has won most attention in the US is the pastoral letter of the Roman Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*.[3] The wide interest in a Catholic statement would have been improbable in the past. But since Vatican II, Catholicism has become a full partner in ecumenical discussions, if not in ecumenical organizations, of the US. (On some issues — notably abortion, where the Catholic position is explicit and Protestantism is divided, and other questions related to sexuality — ecumenical discussion is more difficult.)

The formulation of the pastoral letter was notable for its thoroughness and openness. A committee of five bishops, deliberately chosen to represent diversity of opinions, drafted the pastoral letter. In a series of 14 meetings this committee interviewed a broad spectrum of specialists — theologians, political scientists, and government officials — with clashing opinions. The committee relied on strong staff support from a political scientist and a theologian. It published and circulated a draft letter with a request for comments and criticisms. The responses, amounting to some 700 pages, led to revisions and the publication of a second draft. That led to more responses, including some from the White House, and a third draft. Finally the entire body of bishops met to revise and approve this draft. Never before in the history of the US had a church body developed a social policy with so much public participation and attention.

In some respects the pastoral letter was characteristically Roman Catholic. It drew upon the Bible, the Catholic tradition, and the teachings of the present Pope. Its adoption was an act of bishops. But in other respects the letter sought a response outside the Catholic Church. Since Catholicism assumes a broadly human moral sensitivity — traditionally called natural law — knowable outside Christian revelation, the bishops could reasonably address both their own church and the society.

One other characteristic of the pastoral letter was a careful distinction between "universally binding moral principles" and specific "recommendations which allow for diversity of opinion on the part of those who assess the factual data of situations differently". That distinction is basic to the Thomist tradition. The lack of it or of some comparable distinction in some other traditions may lead to an ethical dilemma: some

[2] *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, Vol. II, *Ethics and Theology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984, p.318.
[3] Washington, United States Catholic Conference, 1983.

Christians, exalting the authority of individual conscience, feel no responsibility at all to the corporate judgment of the church; others feel alienated by church pronouncements attacking opinions that they hold in good faith.

Many of the bishops' conclusions were highly controversial within Catholicism, other churches, and the society at large, including government officials. But the quality of reasoning, including the attention given to dissents in the revision of successive drafts, meant that the letter earned wide praise. Gustafson exempted it from his criticisms of church teaching that I have noted above. While reserving the right to disagree with it, he called it "a model of intellectually responsible ethical reflection for all churches and other communities".[4]

The content of the pastoral letter included: condemnation of any first use of nuclear weapons, endorsement of a halt in manufacture and deployment of weapons, international negotiations leading to a comprehensive test ban and to nuclear disarmament, independent initiatives in nuclear disarmament (even prior to international agreement on disarmament). It included also a call for international justice as a foundation for peace and a protest against the diversion of economic resources from human need to production of armaments.

The bishops faced directly their greatest difficulty: the assessment of nuclear deterrence. They were clear on their "definitive and decisive" rejection of nuclear war, including a rejection of deterrence "as a long-term basis for peace". But they gave it "a strictly conditioned moral acceptance" as an interim measure on the way to "progressive disarmament". Soon after, they designated a committee to reconsider the issue in the light of the lack of progress towards disarmament. That committee is continuing its work, which may be made easier if the US and the Soviet Union achieve a significant measure of disarmament.

Most of the "mainline" churches have adopted policy statements comparable to that of the Catholic bishops. Among them all — far too many to analyze here — the pastoral letter of the Methodist bishops, *In Defense of Creation: the Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace* and its accompanying *Foundation Document*[5] have received most attention. The result of a two-year study, written with full awareness of the Catholic document, it has many similarities. Both are clerical statements, written with considerable lay consultation. Both relate theological conviction and practical policies. Both agree on their opposition to nuclear war and their ardent desire for nuclear disarmament. Both argue strongly that world peace requires a concern for justice, going far beyond armaments.

The Methodist call for "an ethic of reciprocity" agrees fully with the Catholic desire for disarmament by mutual agreement between the major nuclear nations. The Methodist rejection of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), popularly known as Star Wars, addresses an issue that arose after the Catholic document, but it agrees with the Catholic opposition to a new round in the arms race.

One seeming difference may or may not be real. The Catholic bishops, we have seen, were uncomfortable in their "strictly conditional moral acceptance" of nuclear deterrence as a transitional stage on the way to nuclear disarmament. They pointed out that (at the time of their writing) the major nuclear powers were increasing rather than

[4] *Op. cit.*, p.318, n.23.
[5] Nashville, Graded Press, 1986.

reducing their armaments. The Methodist bishops, facing the same situation, declared: "Deterrence must no longer receive the churches' blessing, even as a temporary warrant for the maintenance of nuclear weapons." The question remains: does the denial of a blessing amount to a rejection? Some of the bishops apparently think so, but others do not. In fact, their document rejects, even more explicitly than the Catholics, "immediate, unilateral disarmament". Their reason is that "immediate and total nuclear disarmament by the US might well tempt other countries to develop or expand their own nuclear arsenals, thereby increasing the risk of nuclear war". Strangely, they neglect to say that "immediate and total nuclear disarmament by the Soviet Union might well tempt other countries..." In any case, the outcome is an acceptance, if not a "blessing", of a nuclear capacity that the bishops prefer not to call a deterrent.

A third document, worth comparing with the two episcopal statements, is the report of a committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, *The Nuclear Dilemma: a Christian Search for Understanding*.[6] As the work of a local committee, it claims no ecclesiastical authority. The Diocese of Washington could call on people skilled in diplomacy and politics, as well as theology. The committee, chaired by former Assistant Secretary of State and Ambassador Viron P. Vaky, was made up primarily of lay people, but their report is no less theological in its concern. The committee met almost weekly for two years. It interviewed 45 specialists: scientists, political leaders, military officers, political scientists, diplomats, governmental agents in arms control negotiations. It published a first draft, invited responses, then revised its report. The intense, sustained cooperation of the members exceeds that of any of the other religious reports.

The findings show a special sensitivity to the nuances of policy-making and those misperceptions, especially US misperceptions of the USSR, that frustrate "a more stable basis for coexistence and cooperation" between the two nations. Like the Catholic and Methodist documents, it wants disarmament, but seeks a way to live with the perils of the interim between the present and the distant goal. Like the other two documents, it rejects unilateral disarmament. It does not avoid the foreboding word deterrence, but shifts its meaning by recognizing that "mutual vulnerability" is the present reason why the great powers, despite their antagonisms, must desire peace. Its acceptance, for the time being, of mutual vulnerability, gives special force to the objection to any arms proposals (like the SDI) that, in reality or illusion, aim at invulnerability. The same emphasis on vulnerability has profound theological meaning for all people who recognize human beings as the finite creatures of an eternal God.

Different from the three documents just described is a publication of the National Association of Evangelicals, *Guidelines: Peace, Freedom and Security Studies*.[7] It differs in its intent to be a programme for study, not a policy paper. It is a "call to dialogue", but more than that, since it embodies a point of view and some strong convictions.

Those who expect to find in it a criticism of left-leaning political activists among "national church and ecumenical organizations" will not be disappointed; the polemic is there, slightly qualified by criticism of right-wing ideologists. But those who look

[6] Cincinnati, Foreword Movement Publications, 1987.
[7] Wheaton, Illinois, National Association of Evangelicals, 1986.

only for that will miss some real values in the document. One of these is the recognition, despite explicit acceptance of the Bible as "the only infallible, authoritative Word of God", that "diverse hermeneutical theories, theological conclusions and human fallibility create an environment in which agreement in interpretation cannot always be achieved". That statement is a rebuke to the easy proof-texting so often used by Christians, whether conservative or liberal.

Some of the most basic theological assumptions of the NAE are widely shared in the ecumenical movement. The ultimate peace of God's kingdom is a divine gift, not a human achievement. But that kingdom "is a horizon against which the present can be judged, and towards which future action can be oriented". So the church has a responsibility to act for international peace, "to drive the ploughshare of moral responsibility into the hard soil of political reality".

Whereas other ecumenical documents emphasize the mutual goals of *peace and justice*, the NAE report emphasizes *peace and freedom*. It declares: "We must be concerned simultaneously with peace, international human rights, democratic values and national security." On that basis, distrust of the Soviet Union pervades the document, and there is little mention of reasons why the USSR distrusts the US. The awareness of the universality of sin qualifies, but barely qualifies, the pride in American democracy.

One other fact, beyond its biblical doctrine, protects this report from the worst errors of identifying biblical theology with American ideology. The Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren, historical pacifist churches, are members of the NAE. Although the Guidelines give major emphasis to the classical doctrine of "just war", they include frequent reminders that pacifism is a valid interpretation of the gospel.

The NAE programme, both in its resemblances to and differences from the Catholic and "mainline" Protestant positions, shows the possibilities and difficulties in encouraging a wider ecumenical dialogue. Such a dialogue will require good will and patience. It is worth the effort.

Anybody familiar with the WCC positions on justice and peace will see many similarities, both in method and in conclusions, with the churches in the US. The great advantage of the WCC is its international character. The American churches make an authentic attempt to respond to world voices and world need. But that is not the same as the active presence in every discussion of people from societies that feel the burden of nuclear weapons and economic oppression, with no voice in the decisions that create those forces. The practical advantage of churches in a single country is that they can maintain the sustained interaction needed to explore issues in depth. It would be a financial and logistical impossibility for a WCC committee (unless made up only of Geneva staff) to meet fifty or a hundred times over two years for the sake of deepened interchange and understanding. In the WCC, no matter how careful the preparatory work, final work must be done in haste under pressure. The resulting policies sometimes show the strain. The world church needs both processes — continuous intimate and radically international interaction.

I should make one last comment on a difference between WCC and American statements. The Vancouver Assembly of the WCC (1983) condemns "unequivocally" the "deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons". Then it goes on to say that this belief requires "the struggle to cause one's own nation to commit itself never to own or use nuclear weapons, despite the period of nuclear vulnerability". That would

seem to require US delegates to go home and work for immediate, total, unilateral nuclear disarmament. Most of them are not doing so. I have already noted that Catholic and Methodist bishops — I could name many other church bodies — reject that belief. It is almost certain that some US delegates who voted for the Vancouver resolution came home to support "reciprocal", not unilateral nuclear disarmament. Why the difference? One reason may be tactical. Some Christians, working for a US-USSR treaty of partial disarmament, would lose all public political influence if they advocated total unilateral rather than reciprocal nuclear disarmament. Another reason may be that the belief that is persuasive in one social setting (e.g. Vancouver) seems unreal, perhaps harmful, in another social setting (e.g. at home in the US). That is a reminder of the frailty and contingency of human thought and commitment.

Some persistent theological-ethical issues

The nuclear discussion is one example of Christian social thought and action in our time. Many other examples, especially economic ethics, are available. But it will be more useful here to look at some of the theological-ethical issues that arise persistently in all the examples we might consider.

1. The sources and criteria of ethical judgment

Ethical judgments presuppose sources and criteria of judgment, whether or not explicitly acknowledged. In the present theological and cultural situation, these are far from clear.

Churches characteristically appeal to the Bible. In retrospect we can see that the uses of scripture have varied widely in Thomism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Lutheranism, Calvinism, the Social Gospel, the theologies of the word of God influenced by Barth. Today there is no consensus about biblical authority for contemporary social issues. In much Christian social teaching, the quotations from the Bible are almost a matter of convenience or ornamentation. (I have quoted above the statement of the NAE Guidelines on that issue.)

Ethical judgment also relies on human experience of the external world and on human nature. It may appeal to conscience or reason. Contemporary ethical conversation refers less than in the past to natural law and the natural, more to the human. It is less specific on how to identify the normatively human in the midst of all the varieties of human behaviour. It often refers to the human experience of particular groups, especially the poor and oppressed. Sometimes, within the churches, various interest groups or caucuses present competing claims to ethical authority.

It would be irresponsible to postpone ethical activity until there is agreement on the sources and criteria of ethics. That definition is a continuous process, never completed; and human need is urgent now. But without greater clarity and deeper recognition of the uses of authority, the social mission of the churches will remain confused.

2. The kingdom of God and history

Christian belief has always made some distinction between the justice of the kingdom of God and the fragmentary justice of human societies. Dietrich Bonhoeffer distinguished between the ultimate and the penultimate; Reinhold Niebuhr between the ultimate and the proximate. Scholars talk of eschatology and ethics, and even the least

scholarly ethical discussion makes some distinction between ideal communities and the adjudication of interests characteristic of human societies.

History is littered with the wreckage of false utopias and the disillusion of those who believed in them. Utopians have tended to ignore the reality of power in human affairs or to impose their ideal solutions on recalcitrant people. Even so, our generation — the recent past more than the actual present — has seen a resurgence of utopian aspirations, most notably in the theologies of liberation. Utopias have several functions in society: to shake the dogmatic certitude of existing systems, to awaken fatalistic people to the genuine opportunities for change, and to project actual goals that test the limits of the possible. Each of these deserves its own evaluations. The more profound Christian utopian thinking — say that of a Gustavo Gutierrez — retains a firm distinction between utopia, as a historical project, and the kingdom of God.

Too often the social teachings of the churches dodge the issue. The greatest offence occurs when Christians, condemning wickedness, appeal to sayings of Jesus that they have no intention of practising. A dose of plain honesty would sometimes remedy the situation.

3. The place of empirical evidence and scientific concepts in ethics

The validity of social policies depends not only on their ethical motivation but on accurate knowledge of social situations. Such knowledge is not always easy to come by. Progress towards disarmament depends partly on factual information on the existing weaponry and intentions of "foreign" nations and — what is almost as hard to find — one's own nation. An ethically responsible economic policy requires valid data on the distribution of wealth, the prevalence and causes of unemployment, the gains and losses to different social groups of various monetary and fiscal policies. For such knowledge the churches must look, not to scripture or theology, but to empirical evidence. When the evidence is confusing, the temptation is to select the data that support one's own prejudices or arguments and to ignore conflicting data. The temptation is understandable, since the opposition usually does the same thing. But such methods do not lead to ethically responsible judgments.

The understanding of the contemporary world requires more than information; it requires also concepts that come out of the physical and especially the social sciences. Any ethic that leaps to conclusions without due regard to scientific conceptualization is likely to hurt the people it intends to help. Yet scientific concepts are not infallible. They require ethical evaluation. Scientists, like everybody else, have their hidden agendas. Political economy, for example, is a mixture of science and particular interests. Certainly there are scientific elements in monetary theory; some hypotheses can be verified or refuted in experience. But "sound" monetary theory, as some economists have testified, may also be a scheme designed to perpetuate the advantage of one social class over another.

The problem for social ethics is to give due attention to the empirical and conceptual aspects of any situation, without idolatry of reigning informational and conceptual systems. If scientists are sometimes tempted to turn all human problems into technical problems, religious professionals may be tempted to turn all technical problems into ethical problems. To relate the technical and the ethical requires effort and discipline.

4. Ideology and ethics

Contemporary social ethics is divided in its opinions about the role of ideology in ethics. Ideology is a controversial word, partly because it has many meanings.

In one common meaning, ideology is any understanding of the world that enables people to act effectively in society. There is no social ethic without ideology. Yet ethics must be ready to criticize ideology. When it is commonly said, "such a group is too ideological", the meaning is that the ideology (the understanding of the world) is so dominant that it blocks out of consideration any competing understanding of the world. Such ideology may be impervious to factual data, scientific understanding, or ethical insights that challenge it. For that reason ideology, although necessary and desirable, is dangerous.

There is a second, equally common, meaning of the word. It derives from the Marxist tradition, which sees ideology as a false understanding of the world by privileged people who want to protect their privilege. Marx recognized privilege primarily in economic terms. Today we are more likely to notice also racist, sexist, and various elitist ideologies, all of which have economic aspects but may be more invidious than purely economic bias. (In the ironical history of language, Marxism today is often regarded as an ideology, whereas Marx thought of himself as a scientific critic of ideology.) Using this second meaning of ideology, when we describe a group as "too ideological", we mean that is has so great a stake in its privileges that it cannot recognize factual information or logical argument that threaten its privilege.

What, then, can we say of the role of ideology in Christian ethics? Most Christian social thinking is quite aware of the reality of ideology in ethical argument. Christians, insofar as they are faithful, would like to purge themselves of ideology, in the second sense of the term. Given a Christian awareness of sin, such purging is not easy. It will never be complete. But the gospel is a constant reminder of the perils of privilege.

Christians, on the other hand, do not want to eliminate ideology in the first sense of the term. Like all people, they need an understanding of the world that enables them to act.

The difficulty is that, in actual life, the two kinds of ideology are usually inextricably mixed. The answer to the problem is not to pretend to rise above ideology; that may be the worst self-deception of all. It is to make the best effort at self-understanding, to realize that we all recognize our opponents' ideological errors more easily than our own, and to maintain communication with those who see our ideological weaknesses. It is to know the reality of sin and the necessity of grace.

5. The formulators of Christian social teaching and practice

The preceding considerations have a bearing on the question of who should formulate Christian social policies. They lead to the judgment that clergy cannot be the sole definers of ethics. In the example of nuclear armaments, we have seen the important place given to lay consultants even when bishops develop an ethic. In the WCC lay people have a major part in every stage of the process.

A Christian social ethic requires the insights of people whose vocation is the understanding of theological sources and criteria of ethics. It requires specialists, often scientists, in many areas of knowledge and conceptualization. It requires people with practical experience in economic and governmental processes. It requires people from many areas of the world and from many racial and economic groups, with their

varying experiences. It requires people of diverse and mutually-correcting ideologies. Whatever the formal processes for developing a social ethic, all these groups must affect the outcome.

6. Ambiguity and resolution

This final issue, which pervades all the others I have defined, is the challenge of maintaining both an awareness of ethical ambiguity and a resolute will to act. Ethical ambiguity surrounds most human decisions; yet ethical responsibility requires action, frequently courageous action.

In human affairs the visible actors are not God and Satan. In human conflicts there is virtue and sin on all sides. Nearly always we have something to learn from our opponents as well as from our allies. Always our finite vision needs the insights of others. We crave more wisdom than we have. We are tempted to be most dogmatic when we are most insecure. In our poverty of spirit we have no right to make excessive claims for our own ethical rightness. Christian faith awakens an awareness of the ambiguity of most human situations.

All this is true. But if this is all we know, we may never act. And inaction is a form of irresponsibility. Humility, which can be a virtue, is as often escapism. To plead for more time and more discussion before making a decision, although sometimes essential, can be an evasion. It is more persuasive to those in charge of a situation than to those who suffer its injustice. Christian faith awakens a will to act in the turmoil of the world.

There are times when a Christian says: "Here I stand. God help me. I can do no other." There are times to say: "If you show me something I have not seen, I will change my mind." To know when to say the one and when to say the other, to know how to blend the two, is a gift of grace. But it is not a grace that eliminates our trying.

A Search for Soil for the Mustard Seed

The Impact of Ecumenical Social Thought in Fiji and the Pacific

Suliana Siwatibau and Wendy Flannery RSM

An in-depth assessment of the extent to which major areas of social thought and programmes of social action, generated at the level of the World Council of Churches, have influenced the life of churches in the Pacific, would require, at the very least, a separate study of each Pacific Island country. Not only does each country have its own unique complex of cultural and historical traditions, but each is also characterized by its own unique forms of Christian presence and activity. Having said this, it must also be acknowledged that, in the contemporary situation, certain wider social, political and economic forces and trends which demand a Christian response are making a similar impact on all Pacific countries. We propose in this brief paper to focus initially on the influence of ecumenical social thought on the churches in Fiji, and to extrapolate from this an assessment of its impact in the Pacific as a whole.

An overview of the situation in Fiji

Christians represent 52.9% of the population in Fiji, Hindus 38.1% and Muslims 7.8%. Direct links between the WCC and the Fiji churches are maintained only by the Methodist (36.7%) and Anglican (0.8%) churches, while the Presbyterian Church (0.1%) is linked through its "mother" church in New Zealand. Indirectly, mainly through its membership in the Fiji Council of Churches (FCC) and, through the regional Bishops' Conference, in the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), programmes of the WCC have also to some extent involved the Roman Catholic Church (8.8%). More recently established Christian churches or fellowships, none of which

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represent more than 2% of the population, have remained on the periphery of such programmes.

Each of the churches with direct links to the WCC, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, has made attempts to examine and clarify its stand in relation to certain specific issues of social concern in Fiji. These attempts, however, have varied widely in terms of their institutional impact, their persistence and their scope.

For some years now a department of Christian Citizenship and Social Services, with an advisory committee, has functioned within the Methodist Church. Each year it has focused the church's attention on a specific social issue, through seminars, studies at its annual conference, and programmes which involve members at congregational level. The issues addressed have included nation-building, land ownership and use, and tourism, all very vital in relation to the current situation in Fiji. Attempts within the Roman Catholic Church have been, until recently, on a more informal, personal interest basis with the impetus to form reflection/action groups growing out of social analysis seminars and the influence of international Roman Catholic social teaching on certain specific groups of church personnel. Both the Anglican and Presbyterian churches encourage informal discussion of social issues within their fellowship groups.

At an ecumenical level, the FCC decided a few years ago to establish a committee on Joint Action for Mission as a means for the member churches to address some major social issues in common, but this has not yet found a way of functioning effectively. The only effective joint ventures in this area up until the political crisis in 1987 seem to have been FCC support for a study on squatter settlements and for a housing project for the destitute initiated by the Roman Catholic Church. A somewhat different picture emerges of the Ecumenical Women's Group formed about four years ago. Through taking advantage of the availability of social analysis training workshops, this group has been involved in ongoing reflection and action programmes in response to some major social, political and economic concerns. It was only in 1987 that the group received any significant recognition and support from the FCC, a situation which mirrors the fate of most ecumenical women's groups around the Pacific.

Apart from what has taken place at official church levels, a few individual church ministers have sought to integrate into their congregational ministry the new awareness and insights they have gained from exposure to WCC and PCC social thought and programmes. A number of lay Christians and some ministers have also played an active part in various non-government and citizen organizations concerned with issues of justice and peace. These include the Fiji Anti-Nuclear Group, the YWCA and YMCA, the Fiji National Council of Women, and the Fiji Council of Social Services.

In 1987 in Fiji, two military coups were staged within the space of five months, allegedly in order to ensure the political and cultural supremacy of ethnic Fijians, who had become a minority in their own country. In an attempt to respond to the urgent challenges raised by this critical situation, a few groups were formed to promote theological reflection and dialogue with other major religious traditions in Fiji, not only with a view to mutual religious understanding, but in the hope of finding common ways of responding to the serious social problems to which the situation has given rise. This crisis has also tended to indicate that certain major resources of ecumenical thought, which could have prepared the churches to respond more effectively to it,

have not, up to the present, had any significant impact. We have in mind such WCC programmes as those on racism, the church and politics, militarism, and dialogue with other major religious traditions.

The theological dilemma

Like the churches in other parts of the Pacific, those in Fiji have expressed the desire and claimed the right to develop indigenous or contextual theology. To be effective and relevant, this process would require serious grappling with the major social, political, economic and cultural problems facing Fijian society today. To deal with such problems honestly and to take a truly Christian stand in relation to many of them, would tend to alienate the church not only from many of its members but also from favour with the elite who hold power.

This dilemma is aggravated by the churches' own internal theological dilemma, hinging on their readiness to accept that Christian and church involvement in social concerns is an integral aspect of their mission and witness. The reaction of the churches to socio-economic or socio-political issues seems most often to be linked to considerations of the effects in their own wellbeing, influence and prestige as institutions. In addition, if the churches were really to own the kind of theology of social involvement being promoted in WCC circles and in Roman Catholic social teachings, they would have to undergo an inner conversion in terms of their own power structures and ways of functioning, in order to have credibility in their social outreach. In other words, an honest examination of the root causes of injustice within society would inevitably involve a challenge to the internal life of the churches themselves.

Major social and cultural problems facing Fiji and other Pacific societies

Both in Fiji and in other Pacific countries, the major challenges calling for a Christian response stem from problems of adjustment, socially and culturally, to a fast-changing world and associated changing value systems. There is no doubt that Pacific island countries desire material development, the acquisition of the physical comforts and social pleasures made available through scientific and technological progress worldwide. In the process, however, problems of maladjustment occur, manifesting themselves in alcohol-related disturbances, increasing crime and suicide rates, a growing drug problem, sexual abuse, and corruption in high places, to name but a few symptoms.

Social, economic and political changes which many countries in the West have gradually accommodated over centuries have intruded upon the Pacific within the last fifty years. Christian churches, which have a unique and central role in Pacific life, have had to face these changes largely unprepared. Men and women who find the shelter of church structures a cosy haven remain inflexible. Theological outlooks tend to be closer to the "don'ts" of the Decalogue than to the spirituality of the Sermon on the Mount. So churches exercise their influence by continuing to write their own agendas, with seemingly little sense of the urgent need to respond, individually or ecumenically, to the pressing challenges of contemporary society.

Adjustment problems involve Pacific people in a crisis of identity. In Fiji, for instance, those who claim to stand for the welfare of ethnic Fijians feel that security lies in a return to the way of life of their forebears. The recent military coups are

justified as a means of stemming the erosion of those elements of culture which Fijians hold dear. But Fijians now live in a pluralistic cultural environment, where alongside them live Indians, part-Europeans, Chinese, and other Pacific islanders. Given the fact that the multi-racial and multi-religious texture of Fijian society makes it different from most other Pacific Island societies, problems of adjustment in Fiji will have to be dealt with in a way that accommodates rather than excludes the other major races.

This is a crucial challenge facing the churches. Can the churches be a bridge of reconciliation and integration in a multi-religious society? Some attempts at interfaith sharing through worship and discussions have been tried over the years on a national scale. Mention has already been made of the recent new initiative on the part of a small group of church leaders and other church members who are seeking to express a Christian presence in the midst of and in response to other faiths. The very positive progress that this group has made to date gives reason for hope that its efforts will bear fruit within the wider membership of the churches.

Adjustment needs also arise out of the insularity of Pacific life. Separated as island nations are by vast oceanic distances, ecumenical contacts are expensive though necessary. Those who work in ecumenical circles will have to battle against the superiority complex of national churches, especially the more powerful ones. Instead of using the WCC network to further their own denominational interests, churches need to make a serious commitment to ecumenical initiatives at national and Pacific regional levels, inspired by a broad rather than a narrow, sectarian vision of the kingdom of God which they are called to proclaim and live in the Pacific today.

Adjustment for Fiji also means having to face the fact that a militarization of government has taken place, and to ask what an appropriate Christian and church response to this reality is. In the wake of the two military coups, the return to civilian rule has included the strategy of installing top military personnel in certain very significant government departments. Ultimately, the alliance between military power and government implies that those who supply arms have a say in the running of small island states, and that Fijian and other Pacific islands' politics are likely to be drawn into the whirlpool of international arms deals. The churches, therefore, must study the implications of military rule in the Pacific.

Structural connections with the WCC and its programmes

Formal links between Pacific churches and the WCC have been maintained through programmes of the Pacific Conference of Churches, including regional meetings, and dissemination of PCC and WCC publications; visits of WCC personnel and their participation in Pacific meetings and workshops; participation of Pacific church leaders and other church representatives in WCC-organized or sponsored international meetings and programmes.

The problem has been and remains, however, communication at the level of local communities. Despite much exposure of many church leaders to various aspects of ecumenical social thought, the infiltration of ideas through to the general church membership seems to have been minimal. Tonga could be taken as an example. Some of its prominent church leaders have had much WCC exposure and have been very influential in sharing the direction and programmes of the PCC, but there seems to be very little evidence that local church congregations in Tonga are engaged in reflection on major social concerns in either Tonga itself or in the region as a whole.

Again, the report of the Tonga National Council of Churches (TNCC) presented at the 1986 PCC Fifth Assembly[1] states that one of its aims and goals is "to help Christian public opinion on social and moral issues and to discuss these with Government". Yet in the rather elaborate TNCC structure there appears to be no section for dealing specifically with such issues, nor with wider Pacific issues.

The impact of WCC social concerns programmes in the Pacific

If one can judge by published reports, a high point of awareness and theological reflection with regard to social concerns seems to have been reached in 1981, as illustrated by both the report of the 1981 Fourth PCC Assembly[2] and the report on the Savu (Fiji) consultation, "Partnership in Aid and Mission".[3] The thinking represented in both reports can be seen as a culmination of a series of meetings and programmes throughout the 70s to which the PCC was strongly committed. Some of the more prominent ideas which crystallized at this point were as follows:

— The mission of the church is not just the conversion of individuals and the allieviation of immediate needs through charitable aid. Rather, the church is called to be involved in "the transformation of the world and the creation of a new society".[4]

— The churches are called to help people understand the nature of the world in which they live and the kind of society which reflects gospel values.[5]

— The need for serious examination of ideologies of aid and development, the impact of the world economic order on the Pacific, the link between justice and development, the growing gap between rich and poor both globally and in individual countries, the impact of transnational corporations. Proposals were formulated to counter these kinds of development trends by reinforcing the values expressed in the communal way of life of Pacific peoples.

— The need to counter prevailing ideas of development as largely a matter of economic improvement with a Christian notion of "integral human development" as expressed in both WCC and Roman Catholic international thought.

— The need for the formation of "cells, cadres or small study groups which will reflect on their situations in the light of the biblical revelation" and engage other church members in the action demanded by their reflection.[6] In addition, the call for conscientization and awareness-raising, and for "a team of conscientizers or animators, drawn from our Pacific resources, to hold workshops in various countries for church, traditional and government leaders, to make them aware of the issues and problems confronting them and their people, and of their responsibilities as leaders".[7]

These ideas were promoted through PCC programmes and publications.[8] At national councils of churches level, attempts were made to spread the benefits of aid by channelling resources to more disadvantaged communities and social groups. In few

[1] Report of the PCC 5th Assembly, Western Samoa, 1986, pp.274-278.
[2] Report of the PCC 4th Assembly, Tonga, PCC.
[3] Report on the Savu Consultation, Fiji, Lotu Pasifika Productions/PCC.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp.30-31.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp.23, 51-52.
[6] *Ibid.*, p.52.
[7] *Ibid.*, p.71.
[8] Ratuvili, S., *Spiritual Bases for Rural Development*, Lotu Pasifika Productions. And Winkler, J., *Losing Control: Transnational Corporations in the Pacific Islands Context*, Lotu Pasifika Productions/PCC.

cases, however, does there seem to have been a concerted effort to influence public opinion and decision-making on the major issues involved. It is striking to note that, in the current situation in Fiji, the churches seem to be silent in the face of government initiatives which open the way to the kinds of economic exploitation called into question at PCC level for so many years.

Besides taking up some of the more important thinking of the WCC/CCPD on development and the world economic order, the PCC has also adopted and promoted WCC/CCIA programmes against colonialism as well as its focus on nuclear/militarization issues.[9] With the encouragement of the PCC, some Pacific churches through individual church members have long been participants in the "Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific" movement. Through this participation, they have been constantly exposed not only to nuclear issues, but also to the many indigenous peoples' movements and struggles both within the Pacific and in countries on its edges. A relevant and ongoing response from the churches to these struggles demands the development of a "theology of liberation" by and for Pacific peoples.

Other WCC programmes which have had some impact on Pacific churches are those which promote awareness of the place and rights of women in church and society,[10] and concern for the impact of tourism and the promotion of alternative tourism.[11] As mentioned earlier, two major programmes which do not seem to have been taken up in any depth but which have special relevance in relation to recent developments in Fiji are those on racism and on the dialogue with people of other faiths.

Lack of impact at local church congregation level

The fact that a loss of momentum seems to have followed the 1981 high point is no doubt due in large part to the drastic pruning of the PCC executive structure at that stage. Some further questions, however, need to be raised. Why is it, one must ask, that national church leaders, while they express their support for a church response to major issues of social concern at PCC assemblies and other regional church meetings, seldom seem to act locally to inform their membership and develop awareness and commitment within their local congregations? Is it due to a lack of conviction? Does it imply that the general membership of the church does not perceive itself to be directly affected by many of these issues and is therefore not interested in addressing them? Or is it perhaps because, in Sevati Tuwere's words, "carbon copy theologies from abroad still hang around our theological curriculum"?[12]

The impact of imported theology has been well demonstrated in the significant increase in recent years in the number of people in many Pacific countries who have become followers of "revivalistic", "born-again" Christianity, usually tied to conservative social, economic and political ideologies. This type of Christianity, as experienced in the Pacific, tends to focus on individual morality and an individualistic, moralistic interpretation of Christian behaviour, pre-empting a commitment to wider

[9] Siwatibau, S. & Williams, B.D., *A Call to a New Exodus: an Anti-Nuclear Primer for Pacific People*, Lotu Pasifika Productions/PCC.
[10] *Women in Development: the Role of Women in Church and Society*, report of the first PCC women's consultation, Lotu Pasifika Productions/PCC.
[11] Biddlecomb, C.Z., *Pacific Tourism: Contrasts in Values and Expectations*, Lotu Pasifika Productions/PCC.
[12] "Thinking Theology Aloud in Fiji", in Trompf, G.W. ed., *The Gospel is Not Western*, Maryknoll, Orbis, p.149.

social responsibility. Its current ascendancy in Fiji has to some extent been an obstacle to an honest Christian analysis of the political crisis.

It seems to have had a particularly strong impact on church women, perhaps because its main proponents operate outside formal church structures, and because it provides a certain kind of experience of liberation and security. Some of the earliest meetings of Pacific church women[13] seem to have been characterized by a far more dynamic and forward-looking approach to the role of women in church and society than more recent gatherings in which fundamentalist biblical interpretations of social realities have tended to predominate.

Through the PCC, the churches in the Pacific have begun to be involved in the WCC study programme on "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation" (JPIC). Like other relevant issues raised by WCC programmes in the past, however, the JPIC concerns are likely to remain within a narrow circle of church leadership unless enabling structures are set up to channel the concerns to the grassroots membership and mobilize their interest. In order for this to happen, answers need to be found to certain basic questions: What kind of communication mobilizes people? What kinds of structures are needed to channel this mobilization? What kinds of strategies for Christian social action work in the Pacific? Can social concerns reflection/action groups maintain their momentum if their members do not perceive themselves to be in some way directly affected by the issues which they are addressing? If the process of creating cells, cadres, etc. proposed in 1981 had been followed up, what might this have meant in the current crisis in Fiji? What happens to prophetic voices in the churches and in society at large in the Pacific? Some of these questions are, of course, relevant to the promotion of ecumenical social thought in any part of the world and suggest one important area for an ecumenical learning exchange.

The challenge to Pacific theology

The Fiji churches have joined with other member churches of the PCC in a common search for a theology relevant to Pacific islanders' struggles for survival and recognition in today's world. This has been identified as a search for an indigenous theology. Recognizing that theology in the Pacific is still very heavily influenced by Western theological traditions, the Pacific churches have begun the task of "localizing" Christian theological symbols and their interpretation, drawing on the resources of their own rich cultural heritages.

The possibilities of this process can be illustrated with reference to the JPIC study. Traditional Pacific beliefs intimately connect the divine, the human and the rest of the natural world. This connection, according to Tuwere, has been split asunder by Christian teaching which emphasizes salvation at the expense of creation.[14] The theological underpinnings of the JPIC study in the Pacific could well be based on a revival of traditional spirituality which integrates a respect and care for the environment with a concern for the human spirit and its relationship with God.

Some concern has already been expressed about the danger of indigenous theology being narrow and irrelevant, especially if the process of dialogue between gospel and culture focuses largely on the past and on static concepts of culture. This is why the

[13] *Women in Development, op. cit.*
[14] *Op. cit.*, p.152.

term "contextual theology" has begun to take on more significance for some Pacific theologians. It suggests the idea of theological reflection as an ongoing process, willing to enter into dialogue with contemporary realities without ignoring the richness of the past. In Fiji, for example, the question has been posed: What does indigenous theology mean in a multi-cultural society? The need for a relevant "political theology" has also become much more evident.

The whole question of indigenous or contextual theology needs to be seen within the context of the church's mission. It seems clear that Pacific churches must take leadership in demonstrating Christian concern and pointing the way forward to Pacific participation in a future world of justice and peace, where individual and communal rights are respected, and where just structures of administration and government are upheld. Certainly, not too many Pacific island countries enjoy these basic requirements of a society based on gospel values. What is more, the dominant Christian churches have become an integral part, and supporters by their silence, of prevailing unjust political and social structures in many Pacific societies. This is why the Methodist Church of Fiji in particular cannot now wrest itself clear of the current struggle for indigenous political domination.

Along with the political changes in Fiji there has emerged an informal "state theology" based on biased interpretations of scriptural texts selected to justify the situation. This has caused serious fissures within a church membership unprepared for the upheaval and lacking appropriate theological understanding. Had the church been active in conscientizing its membership on prevailing socio-economic and political issues, the rift may not have been so deep. The Fiji church now has an opportunity to identify with courage the appropriate role of the Christian church in the political arena and life of a nation. If this challenge is taken up, the outcome will surely be of great interest and value to the other PCC member churches both in Fiji and throughout the region.

Conclusion

Ecumenical social thought can be perceived as an attempt on the part of Christians, working together to interpret social reality from a gospel perspective with a view to inspiring Christian social action for the creation of human societies in which God's reign is more clearly manifest. In order for the seeds of such thought to take strong root and flourish in the Pacific, there is a need for Pacific theologians, using all the resources at their disposal, to identify the deepest groanings, the birth pangs (cf. Rom. 8:22-23) of Pacific peoples today, and to provide a theological description of these groanings in such a way that the challenge they present to those who claim to follow Christ will clearly emerge.

The Church in Africa and Contemporary Sociological Challenges

Kofi Asare Opoku

The integrity of African culture

The church in Africa, especially in the sub-Saharan areas, came into existence as part of the European expansion into Africa, and it still bears the marks of its parentage. It was part of the cultural invasion from Europe which did not have much regard for the dignity of African culture and which therefore adopted a disdainful and condemnatory attitude to things African. This in turn led to the despising and debasement of the African. The intolerant and rather authoritarian manner in which this enterprise was carried out left a deep wound in the African spirit. There was a negation of the African experience, in spite of the undeniable contribution of the church to Africa. Alioune Diop's poignant statement at the First International Congress of Africanists in Accra, in 1962, has significance for us even today. He said:

> At the very heart and centre of the Church in Africa, we have in fact witnessed the mutilation of the African personality, and the trampling of human dignity in Africa.[1]

A people's dignity cannot be separated from their culture and any attempt to downgrade their culture amounts to trampling on their souls. And, particularly when the missionary enterprise attempted to Europeanize Africans before Christianizing them, and to create a European civilization in Africa by discarding what was indigenous, it was almost as if the church were attempting to crucify Africans culturally in order to resurrect them as pale images of Europeans. This is the problem Archbishop E. Milingo was wrestling with when he wrote:

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[1] *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Africanists*, Accra. London, Oxford University Press, 1964, pp.50-51.

> If God made a mistake by creating me an African it is not yet evident. My antagonists have not yet given me summons to call me to the High Court of God where he will undo me as an African in order to make me a European as a *conditio sine qua non* for becoming a full Christian.[2]

The urgent moral necessity for the church in Africa is to affirm that God is not absent in African culture. This is not to suggest that African culture is without blemish in the sight of God. All cultures are under the judgment of God. But it is essential for the church to uphold and affirm African cultural identity in order to restore dignity and wholeness to a deeply-wounded African spirit. Where the church endeavoured at one time to replace the people's Africanness with something else, it now has to affirm, unequivocally, that in our Africanness lies an individualized expression of God and that Africans exist by virtue of God's own divine purpose. This can be accomplished when the church affirms that no one particular religious tradition has a monopoly on holiness, that sanctity does not reside solely in conversion to Christianity and that the self-disclosure of God is not limited to one particular religious or cultural tradition.

The earlier attitude of the church severely limited the arena of God's activity and denied God's self-disclosure in the African tradition before the arrival of Christianity. Pointing out this error on the part of the church, Idowu wrote:

> It was a serious mistake that the church took no account of the indigenous beliefs and customs of Africa when she began her work of evangelization. It is now obvious that by a misguided purpose, a completely new god who had had nothing to do with the past of Africa was introduced to her peoples. Thus there was no proper foundation laid for the gospel message in the hearts of the people and no bridge built between the old and the new; the church has in consequence been speaking to Africans in strange tongues because there was no adequate communication.[3]

The church had no right to turn people into strangers in their own land. In spite of the cultural erosion that has taken place under a combined missionary and colonial effort, African Christians still live and breathe African culture and cannot completely move away from their cultural background. And it is from this self-acceptance that a genuine African expression of Christianity can emerge in order to give expression to who we are in the depths of our being, both individually and communally.

From this source will also emerge a genuine African Christian theology which will be free from the "Northern captivity" of the church and which will go beyond issues of schizophrenic religion[4] into the larger and deeper questions of the creative encounter between the gospel and our lives in Africa, culturally, economically and politically.

The emergence of the indigenous churches (a term to be preferred to the more widely used term "Independent" churches, since the latter has an external reference point) seems to have made up for some of the deficiencies in the mission-founded churches. For underlying this phenomenon is the assumption that a Christian society

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[2] *The World in Between: Christian Healing and the Struggle for Spiritual Survival*, London, C. Hurst, 1984, p.74.

[3] "The Predicament of the Church in Africa", in C.G. Baeta ed., *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, London, Oxford University Press, 1968, p.423.

[4] "Whither African Theology?" in E. Fashole-Luke, Richard Grey, Adrian Hastings and Godwin Tasie eds, *Christianity in Independent Africa*, London, Rex Collins, 1978, pp.364-369.

can be built on the foundations of African culture; and these churches, to a considerable extent, have incorporated more and more of insights from the African cultural heritage into their warp and woof, and at the same time contributed something quite distinctive to world Christianity.

But the indigenous churches, like the mission-founded churches, have not gone far enough. In the area of symbols, for example, the Euro-Christian influence is still predominant. There are many traditional religious symbols which come out of our tradition and which have yet to gain a place among Christian symbols in Africa. The docile acceptance of European symbols in our churches, and the pictures of the European or Caucasian Jesus which still adorn some indigenous churches and mission-founded churches, reveal how much further we have to go in giving expression to African authenticity.

In the area of architecture, too, the Western attitude towards space still prevails. In our traditional shrines, space lies outside the shrine and not inside it, but the church building closes people in or shuts Christians off from the community. The box church continues to be duplicated all over Africa and architecture presents a serious challenge which the church has yet to take up creatively.[5]

It is clear that the negation of the African experience and the attempt to set aside the traditional culture have closed the church's eyes and ears to many opportunities for enriching its own life and contribution to modern Africa. For if the church had taken the traditional religion seriously it would have discovered that the communal religious festivals which abound in Africa take place not inside the shrines but outside in the wide open spaces in the community in order to involve the entire community. In contrast, all our major Christian festivals take place inside the church and shut out the community. What Takenaka said has a serious bearing on the African situation as well:

> We are indeed entering a new stage of our pilgrimage in human history; we need to take each basic culture seriously in order to attain the unity of humankind. Local and ethnic cultures cannot be given up for the sake of a national or international culture. In our common pilgrimage, the local and ethnic identity should not be an appendage to national life. It goes beyond national boundaries since it touches something essential and basic to human life. It invites echoes and aspirations of the universal.[6]

The church in Africa should encourage the development of self-awareness which would buttress an African identity in order to counter effectively all attempts to undermine African humanity and stifle African creativity. And, in healing the wounds inflicted on the past, those who hold negative views about Africans will also be freed from their narrow-mindedness and prejudice, which are unmistakeable signs of weakness and sickness.

Racism and apartheid

In spite of all protestations to the contrary, and in spite of all the claims by Christians of the oneness of humankind in Christ, Africans continue to suffer from racial prejudice and discrimination at the hands of Christians and others. And in South Africa, the apartheid system has reached unmatched heights of barbarity. Whatever

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[5] See Masao Takenaka, *God is Rice: Asian Culture and Christian Faith*, Geneva, WCC, 1986, pp.46-48, where the author discusses similar problems related to church architecture in Asia.
[6] *Ibid.*, p.37.

interpretation may be given to racism, it is quite clear that any system of thought and action which engenders prejudice against a people simply because of the way God created them is an attempt to impugn the wisdom of God. For no human being decided to make himself or herself; what we are is based on the wisdom of the Creator; and all human beings have equal value in the sight of God. Racism cuts at the root of Christian claims to belief in God and the person of Jesus Christ. And the perpetrators of racism remain unaware that by practising such inhuman acts, they are constantly in rebellion against God.

The very existence of apartheid is an affront to the dignity of Africans and other non-white people and it does unmitigated violence to their sense of being human. At the same time, apartheid also does incalculable violence to the humanity of its perpetrators. The Akan maxim puts it: *onipa gye nkannare a, osen dade*, a rusty human being is worse than (rusty) iron.

How to rid ourselves of this scourge is a serious moral question and Christians in the ecumenical movement, as well as others, have been giving advice to the afflicted and debating whether violence is a Christian option. If the Nazi experience is anything to go by, all that most Christians would do is to express a deep sense of guilt after the cataclysm has taken place. For history seems to be repeating itself and the world stands by as millions suffer unbelievable oppression.

The tremendous efforts the WCC has made through its Programme to Combat Racism and all the other laudable efforts of the ecumenical movement must, of course, be acknowledged. The September 1987 Letter from the WCC general secretary, Emilio Castro, is particularly refreshing in its sincerity and realism:

> Those from outside must recall, when speaking about violence or non-violence, that it is not they, but others, who will be called upon to pay the price of following their advice.

He concludes his letter:

> While agonizing together over the problem of violence in South Africa, let us not forget our own vocation in the particular situations we are in. Those of us who feel called to non-violent witness should be ready to assume on ourselves the sufferings of the oppressed and to acknowledge that we are responsible to participate in challenging and removing all structures of oppression. Those of us from outside also know how much remains to be done in our own nations to express solidarity with South Africa's suffering people, while praying that the tragedy of civil war will be averted. The central issue is not methodology but the recognition of equal dignity of all God's children.[7]

The equal dignity of all God's children is certainly a central value that cannot and must not be compromised by those who claim to believe in God. The method of attaining this equal dignity of all God's children may differ depending on our religious persuasions, our distance from the scene of suffering, our awareness of the depth of injustice, our fondness for fine arguments in the face of real crises.

It seems to me that those involved in the actual struggle are the right persons to select their options, violent or non-violent, and those outside must not indulge in the luxury of passing judgment from a safe distance. For in the end it is not the judgment of the method chosen which will decide what happens to apartheid; it is what its victims do to rid themselves of it. Of course the victims cannot do it alone, they need the support of men and women who will not compromise themselves when the dignity of other children of God is brutally assaulted.

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[7] *From the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches*, September 1987.

If the rest of the world felt that apartheid was a threat to their security, as we Africans feel, they would go to war to end it, and the question of violence or non-violence would not arise. Did Europe go to war against Hitler because he killed six million Jews or did Europe go to war because it felt its security threatened by Hitler?

The problem of apartheid is a human, moral one. And Christians in particular, if their faith is to be relevant, must remain committed to the liberation of the children of God so that all can live as the creatures of God. And here I think that the church in Africa in particular, and the ecumenical movement in general, should give serious consideration to the suggestion that apartheid should be classified as a crime against humanity and its perpetrators liable to be tried as war criminals.[8]

Allan Boesak's call to the people of Japan during his recent visit to Tokyo needs to be taken seriously:

> Our call (to the people of Japan) is clear: we are asking for solidarity. We want you to help us by putting pressure on your government and the business community to stop collaborating with the Pretoria regime against us; and do not be misled by the South African government's statement that it is reforming the system. Apartheid cannot be reformed. The best remedy for it is immediate change for a democratically elected government involving all South Africans. And do not also be misled by the argument propagated and perpetuated by the friends of the Pretoria regime that sanctions will harm the Africans. What you ought to know is that that argument is not in our interest but rather in the interest of the very people who purportedly are sympathizing with us. We are now imbued with the preternatural instinct to know that the immediate concern of those who propagate that line of thought is profit.[9]

It is not to the situation in South Africa alone that attention needs to be drawn in our discussion of racism in Africa. Mention must also be made of the situation in some of the Arab countries where black African citizens are severely discriminated against. Again, one is painfully aware of the yawning distance between high-level religious pronouncements about the "brotherhood of man" in Islam and everyday behaviour.

In Mauritania, for example,[10] the Freedom Movement, Mouvement El Hor, established by Black Mauritanians, published a 37-page pamphlet, *The Manifesto of the Oppressed Black-Mauritanians: From Civil War to National Liberation Struggle, 1966-1986*, which likened the racial oppression in Mauritania to apartheid and said that the black Mauritanians — the Soninke, Hall-Pulaar, Wolof and Haratin — are regarded by the Moors, who see themselves as Arabs, as slaves. The pamphlet further added that the culture of the black African Mauritanians is negated by the government, their land is expropriated and there is a concerted government policy to "Arabize" them. Political power, the army, the economy and education are exclusively in the hands of the Moors. This situation led to civil war in 1966 and to student agitation in 1986.

Earlier in 1983, a movement, the Africa Liberation Forces of Mauritania, FLAM, was established to fight the racist system in the country, demand democratic reforms, and seek the acknowledgment of the rights of the black Mauritanians to cultural

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[8] See Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe's review of E. Hanson ed., *Africa: Perspectives on Peace and Development*, in *West Africa*, No. 3666, 16 November 1987, p.2258.
[9] See *West Africa*, No. 3669, 7 December 1987, p.2386.
[10] See *West Africa*, No. 3660, 5 October 1987, p.1995.

difference. There have been many arrests, detentions, stiff prison sentences and tortures, and a number of FLAM members have had to flee the country.

The African churches need to become aware of such situations and draw attention to them, put pressure on their governments to raise such issues at the international level and seek the cooperation of the ecumenical movement in compiling data and jointly seeking a solution to such problems. Above all, issues such as these provide an excellent agenda for inter-religious dialogue between African Christians and Muslims.

Peace and security

All this brings to light the different apprehensions we have about peace and security in our world today. For if our partisan interests do not permit us to acknowledge what constitutes threats to peace and security, then we may be giving aid and comfort to oppressors and helping to perpetuate the conditions of conflict.

We need to appreciate the fact that racism and oppression are threats to peace in our world. For the apartheid system can engulf the world in a bloody confrontation if steps are not taken to eliminate it, and it is not only the victims of apartheid who should regard racism as a threat to peace.

It may be that the availability of nuclear arms in the world today and the threat they pose to the safety of humankind have led many people to associate peace with nuclear disarmament. The frightening facts of a nuclear war are, indeed, sobering. A 1983 World Health Organization study stated that in the event of a nuclear war, one billion people would be killed outright in a first exchange of nuclear weapons and an additional billion people would die from injuries, blast, fire and radiation.[11] Christians and all people of good will must relentlessly seek ways and means of achieving nuclear disarmament in order to secure peace and security for the entire world.

But it is also a fact that if all the nuclear arsenals were destroyed and a complete and absolute halt were put to the manufacture of nuclear weapons and deterrents, as well as other weapons of mass destruction like chemical and biological weapons, the oppression resulting from racism which Africans suffer would still remain, and it is therefore necessary for us constantly to bear these threats to peace in mind and deal with them realistically.

Many African governments, in the name of "national security", spend enormous amounts on the purchase of arms, and are therefore unable to provide essential services like education, health and communications. The church needs to draw attention to this situation and educate its members to see that poverty and inequalities are also threats to peace; it should encourage governments to see that the answer to our socio-economic problems does not lie in the acquisition of more and more arms and that the build-up of arms has in it the seeds of the destruction of the government which engages in it.

Economic exploitation

It hardly needs pointing out that the resources of Africa are exploited to support countries which lie outside Africa, especially in the West, and the handful of local people who work for the interest of foreign exploiters. This situation, which began

[11] See "The 'Cost' of Today's Peace", Marian Dobrosielski, *Work in Progress* (United Nations University), Vol. 10, No. 3, October 1987, p.3.

since the colonial days, remains largely unchanged today, thirty years after independence.

The implications of Africa's imposed role as a primary producer of raw materials has many debilitating aspects with severely crippling consequences. It must be borne in mind that this abnormal situation has taken a couple of centuries to crystallize and its correction will need the joint effort of Africans and people in the highly industrialized areas of the world. As a primary producer of raw materials, emphasis is placed on export crops to the neglect of locally required food, and fertile lands which could be made to produce local food in fact produce what the people do not need. This leads to insufficient food production and hunger. The price of the cash crops is determined by the buyers who always dictate cheaper prices in order to maximize their profits. Attempts to process raw materials before exporting them meet with resistance and high tariffs which make them uncompetitive and lead to a return to the production of raw materials.

At the same time, the manufactured products which the buyers of the raw products make are sold at exorbitant prices since the control of the prices of manufactured goods lies in the hands of manufacturers. On both counts, therefore, Africa is at the mercy of the industrialized nations which are determined to keep their position of advantage over Africa. The United Nations Secretary General's report in 1987[12] on the United Nations Programme for Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAARED) recalls some staggering facts. It notes that commodities' prices for Africa plummeted to their lowest levels in thirty years and that total export receipts fell by $19 billion to $46 billion (from $65 billion in 1985). Meanwhile the prices of imported manufactured goods increased by 20 percent, which resulted in a 1986 deterioration in terms of trade of about 32 percent.

This unjust economic relation has plunged Africa further and further into crippling poverty and underdevelopment which has had adverse effects on its people. Export earnings are consumed by the high cost of imports which leads to a huge gap which is filled by taking loans and accepting aid grants. And increasingly the borrowing of huge sums of money and the high rates of interest have become one of the major stumbling blocks to Africa's development. For, while Africa needs all the money she can get to finance much-needed projects, she has to meet her debt obligations and send more money out than she receives from outside. This trend has been on the increase since 1981, and in 1985 Africa exported goods worth $21.5 billion. Bob Geldorf's Live Aid in 1985 raised an impressive £50 million for famine in Africa, but as John Clark points out in his book, *For Richer for Poorer*,[13] for every one pound which was given in famine relief in 1985, the West reclaimed some two pounds in debt payments.[14]

On the whole, about half of Africa's Gross Domestic Product and nearly three to four times its annual export income, a figure which ranges between $150-200 billion, represents Africa's current debt. The servicing of this huge and crippling debt means that in most instances nearly 50-100 percent of all income from exports must go into servicing debts, leaving nothing for other essentials and pressing needs. And while

[12] See *West Africa*, No. 3663, 26 October 1987, p.2125.
[13] London, 1986.
[14] As quoted in *West Africa*, No. 3641, 25 May 1987, p.1009.

outside assistance has been received, the extent of indebtedness and its servicing make its impact rather slight since increasingly more money leaves Africa than comes in.

While it is true that the blame for some of these huge debts lies squarely on the shoulders of some of our profligate leaders in Africa, the responsibility to face the problem and deal with it justly and realistically rests on all, debtors and creditors. An Akan proverb says that if someone accidentally kills an animal, you do not accidentally skin it. In other words, if someone makes a mistake you do not aggravate it or make it worse. Creditors have every right to collect their loans but they should not overburden debtors with demands which end up taking their dignity from them as human beings.

These burning issues do not receive much attention from the church which keeps on dwelling on "spiritual" concerns, leaving these hard facts of life to politicians and governments. The neglect of socio-political issues may be due to our missionary upbringing which separated the sacred from the secular, and now the church seems unable to stray from its prescribed area of operation into the pressing areas of life for fear of being accused of mixing politics with religion, or dabbling in technical matters of stupendous complexity and bewildering depth in which it has little or no competence. And yet, it is in these areas that the church can demonstrate its concern for justice — economic, social and political — which is part of its total mission in the world.

The church should become aware of the socio-economic conditions in which its members live and strive to search for humane solutions. In the exploitation of African resources to the detriment of African people, the church should relentlessly advocate the sharing of resources for the good of all, for all resources belong to God who gave them abundantly for the good of his children. Sharing the abundant resources of the world in such a manner as will bring dignity for all, as John Pobee rightly observes, requires a "real conversion experience with regard to some of the practices in the international economic order".[15] And the effort must continue to be made for that "conversion experience", because we are all witnesses to the gross injustices and inequalities which have resulted from leaving the "economic forces" entirely to themselves.

The church in Africa can make the crushing effects of exploitation known to other Christians and especially those who live in the countries which perpetuate such injustices, and together bring pressure to bear on governments and business interests to give priority to human beings and their needs. Quite apart from this, the African church can also through its ministry inculcate in its people self-reliance, hard work and industry and thus enable them to stand on their own feet.

The call by the Pontifical Commission "Justice and Peace", issued in January 1987, for an ethical approach to the problem of international debt, based on the conviction that cooperation transcending collective selfishness and vested interests could effectively tackle the debt crisis and mark progress along the path of international economic justice,[16] showed much admirable originality in putting emphasis on the human and moral dimensions of the problem. The call is a challenge to all churches to act in the

[15] *Who are the Poor: the Beatitudes as a Call to Community*, Geneva, WCC, 1987, p.62.
[16] See *Development Forum*, Vol. IV, No. 3, April 1987 (published by the UN Division for Economic and Social Information/DPI and the United Nations University).

face of this problem which is hurting a significant segment of humankind, pushing them deeper and deeper into poverty and near helplessness.

Exploitation is not limited to the relations between Africa and the highly industrialized countries. Within individual countries in Africa, there exist glaring social inequalities and disparities which are quite self-evident, and in this area the church can demonstrate its role as a healing community. The gap between the rich and poor is widening and this is increasing discontent and disharmony in our societies. What can the Christian community do about it? Merely preaching about the love of God and the need for generosity is not enough. Counselling the poor to be content with their lot is even worse. Often the church adopts an other-worldly stance and speaks against the acquisition of earthly goods. But in so doing, the church betrays her Lord and Master whose earthly ministry was spent healing the sick, feeding the hungry and taking care of the afflicted and associating with the poor and despised.

The church's healing ministry in this instance must begin with the firm conviction that God, the Creator of humankind, has generously given what we need for our sustenance and that it is the will of God that all God's children should have unhindered access to the world's goods. The care of the poor, then, should be a particular concern of the church and the attitude should not be that of the rich and well-to-do doling out crumbs to the wretched poor, a means which keeps the poor firmly entrenched in their poverty because they are always put at the receiving end, and are rarely, if ever, given the opportunity of finding out what they can do for themselves.

Lack of economic opportunity is not the only aspect of poverty. There is also the whole area of lack of knowledge and awareness which particularly afflicts rural dwellers, and contributes tremendously towards widening the gap between rural and urban areas. The church can help bridge the gap by bringing in knowledgeable people to hold discussions with rural parishioners to increase their awareness; it could also establish libraries in each parish so that parishioners could borrow books to read. Stocking up the libraries should not be a difficult task, for parishioners can donate books to start a church library service so that every parish could have a small library of its own.

In the case of those members who are unable to read or write, the church could resume a former practice whereby adult literacy classes formed an important part of the Sunday school programme, as a result of which many people learned to read and write. The church has within its ranks a large number of people who are literate and who can help their less fortunate brethren to learn to read and write.

Healing

The church's practice of healing is based on biblical precedent and the example of Jesus Christ whose earthly ministry was taken up by preaching and healing. Through his healing ministry, Jesus demonstrated God's concern to deliver people from the evil of sickness and disease. Healing is an integral part of the church's ministry and the attempt by the missionary church to separate healing from worship rendered the church's ministry less effective. Certainly religion is concerned with health, and in our traditional African societies, priests and priestesses practise medicine, for religion covers every aspect of life, and worship alone does not exhaust the meaning of religion.

In this regard, the new indigenous churches seem to be pointing the way to reintegrate worship with healing. There is need, however, for caution, in the extreme cases where faith healing is preferred to the use of medicine, African or Western. What needs to be emphasized is that God has power to heal our ailments, and faith in God's healing power should certainly be stressed by the church. But this should not lead to a rejection of the use of medicine, for, after all, knowledge of medicine is also a gift of God, and we cannot reject any of God's gifts in the name of religion.

Historically, the church in Africa accepted Western medicine, downgrading African traditional medicine as pagan and regarding members who availed themselves of it as backsliders. The result is that many Christians consult herbalists and priests rather stealthily for fear of being found out.

It needs to be stated categorically that there is nothing ungodly or devilish about African traditional medicine and that it is a gift of God to people. As such, it needs to be given encouragement so that it can contribute its full potential to the health delivery system of humankind; to suppress it amounts to trampling upon God's gift. The value and contribution which African traditional medicine can make has been acknowledged by the World Health Organization, and the church can encourage African medicine and remove the stigma attached to it.

Pastoral care

The middle-class posture of the mainline churches in Africa constitutes a severe barrier in their effectiveness. This also accounts for the rise of indigenous churches to meet the needs of ordinary people. For there is a certain politeness which separates the priest or pastor from the parishioner, and makes the average parishioner unable to discuss his or her problems with the pastor, whereas the same parishioner will not hestitate to share such problems with a prophet or prophetess of an indigenous church or with a priest or priestess at a shrine. This is a real challenge to the mainline churches in Africa, and Archbishop E. Milingo's reflections on the problem are quite apposite:

> I do not remember so far in the archdiocese of Lusaka any parish priest who was so trusted by his parishioners that they were open with him and came to him with their real problems. The hesitant way of giving answers to problems, and the postponement of final decisions still to come from final consultations, put off many troubled souls, while the clients of Mr X and Mrs Y get their answers easily, as they can consult them at any time. Is it strange, then, that the people tend to believe that one can ask a priest only what he knows from his academic and theological studies and nothing beyond? The traditional spiritual consultant speaks to the ancestors and other protective spirits and they give the answer. Yes, they often mislead the people, but does the church offer alternatives and preach the absolute when Christians need answers to their problems?[17]

If the church is seen by its parishioners to be the place for only "decent" problems, then it is not meeting the real needs of the people, social and spiritual. Such an understanding dichotomizes our lives; decent problems go to church on Sunday, and during the rest of the week, when we are engulfed in "indecent" problems we take them to other places for solution. As a Kenyan nun said: "We leave him (God) in the church on Sunday and ask our ancestral gods to accompany us for the rest of the week."[18]

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[17] *Op. cit.*, p.77.
[18] *Ibid.*

We need to proclaim that there is no area in our lives which is too low for God or too "indecent" to bring to church for answers. Of course the teaching of the missionary church largely demarcated what "decent" and "indecent" problems are. The reality of evil forces, witches, demons, etc. in Africa needs to be underscored, but the missionary church denied the existence of such forces without realizing that it was merely being Western in its teaching and not necessarily biblical. For the Bible acknowledges principalities and powers and the rulers of darkness in this world as well as demons but it teaches that God's power overcomes them all. This is the kind of teaching which is coming from the indigenous churches which deal with the "indecent" problems of their clients by providing healing for troubled souls afflicted by witchcraft and demonic forces, lack of success in life and the fears which rapid social changes bring in their wake. The attachment of the mainline churches to Western values and ideas helps to perpetuate African dependence on extraneous Western values which are inimical to indigenous and authentic development and the church can help bring about true liberation by giving encouragement and recognition to local initiative and resourcefulness. This will also have a direct bearing on theology which, as Koyama aptly and succinctly puts it, is "... to paint the image of God in Christ with the colours provided with one's locality".[19]

Human rights

Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his keynote address to the Fifth General Assembly of the All-Africa Conference of Churches held at Lome, Togo, 13-25 August 1987, said:

> Often and often it pains us to have to admit that there is less freedom and personal liberty in most independent Africa than there was during the much-maligned colonial days. The Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot allow us to keep silent in the face of this. The truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ constrains us to speak up and to speak out against that which is contrary to the Gospel.

It has been far easier for African churches to speak out against apartheid and other international issues which are far away from their shores and such pronouncements have always received the commendation of governments. But the moment the church makes a critical pronouncement on national issues then the governments level the charge that the church is "playing politics". It appears that governments know the boundaries of church activity and are determined to keep them, but the church, if it is to be true to her Lord, has no boundaries, so to speak, and every arena of human activity comes under the purview of the church.

Especially where human rights are abused, the church has a duty to speak boldly. Both the Christian Council and the Catholic Bishops' Conference valiantly defended human rights in Ghana during the early days of the present regime and although the government felt uncomfortable the church was able to make the government take it seriously as a voice for what is in the ultimate interest of the country.

But in many countries governments are rather hostile and do not welcome alternative ideas and approaches to national issues and take punitive measures against those who hold contrary views. The church has an enormous task to educate its

[19] *Ministerial Formation in a Multi-faith Milieu: Implications of Interfaith Dialogue for Theological Education*, eds Sam Amirtham and S. Wesley Ariarajah, Geneva, WCC, 1986, p.98.

members as well as the general public in the various African countries that open discussion, which after all is not foreign to our indigenous traditions, is more conducive to progress and national advancement than its suppression. The church can use its newspapers, though some may be banned, to offer opportunity for the expression of alternative viewpoints which after all go to help the nation in its search for a way forward.

The issue of the role of women in our societies is a burning one and the church's own record in terms of its attitude to women and the role they play in the church is dismal. For many centuries, women have contributed to the maintenance of a male-dominated clergy,[20] and have played roles which only supported the status quo.

And yet in Africa, generally, the role of women in traditional religion is acknowledged. There have been priests and priestesses who were chosen by the gods as their servants. It is spiritual power, which comes through the agency of the gods, that is of primary consideration and not the sex of the servant. Christianity came to reverse the role of women in religion by reserving priesthood for males only. The practice significantly added to some of the restrictions which women suffered in traditional society. But, once again, the emergence of the indigenous churches has helped place women in leadership positions, and one finds many women church founders and leaders in the new churches.[21] As long as any society prevents a segment of its population from participating fully in its affairs it is depriving itself of an enormous amount of its potential. And, especially for the Christians in the church, there is the need to realize that the image of God is in men as well as women and we cannot deny that reality to women.

Refugees and displaced persons

Africa has the largest number of refugees, estimated to be over five million, and the African churches' assistance programmes and those of the World Council of Churches and a number of governments have been commendable. These programmes have sought to alleviate the human suffering, anxiety and frustration which refugees experience. In recent years the numbers have increased due to political revolutions and repressions, inter-ethnic rivalries, military coups which lead to persecution of opponents, civil wars in countries which are exacerbated by foreign assistance to parties in the conflicts and also by natural disasters such as drought.

While immediate assistance to refugees is imperative on the basis of the churches' sense of mission, it is important for the churches in Africa to give some attention to the causes of the refugee problem and to be in constant dialogue with authoritarian governments about the need to encourage the expression of alternative viewpoints in national affairs and the need to minimize inter-ethnic strife. And, where natural disasters threaten human life, the church can use its resources to teach people soil conservation, the planting of drought-resistant trees, and in areas which are faced with desertification the church can use its resources, both locally and internationally in the ecumenical movement, to tackle the problem.

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[20] For further reading, see "The Role of Women in Freetown Churches", Filomena Chioma Steady, in Fashole-Luke *et al, op. cit.*, pp.151-163.

[21] See "Indigenous African Christian Churches", in *African Theology en Route*, eds K. Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1979.

Polygamy and the eucharist

The question of polygamy has faced the African church since early years and the church's attitude to it continues to be inflexible. The general presupposition in the church is that polygamy is inherently sinful and that those who contract polygamous marriages live in sin. Furthermore the church assumes that one cannot sincerely love Christ and be a polygamist at the same time. For these reasons, the church, especially mainline mission-founded churches, debar polygamists from attending the Lord's Supper, and also refuse them baptism.

The church insists that a polygamous man should divorce all his wives except the first one, before being allowed to attend holy communion. The same rule applied in most cases to baptism. The hardships which many people have gone through before being adjudged righteous enough to partake of the Lord's Supper defy description, but the church considers this of little consequence, since in its view divorcing all one's wives and imposing untold hardship on many women and children is what Christ demands of those who love him and are allowed by the church to partake of the Lord's Supper.

The church's position is that there is biblical evidence for the system of monogamy and that polygamists are living in sin. But there is no explicit biblical evidence for this view and the Western practice of monogamy is what has influenced the church's position today. This, however, is not to suggest that polygamy was necessarily the rule in traditional African society. Monogamy was and is practised, but the option has always been there for many reasons, which makes polygamy lawful and permissible in traditional society.

It seems that the church uses the Lord's Supper as an instrument of discipline, which is quite contrary to what the Lord intended it to be. It is the Lord who has freely offered himself to humankind and set his table; how can any human being debar another person from attending? What is the biblical authority for this exclusion, which separates the righteous (monogamists) from the unrighteous (polygamists) in our church? What place does individual conscience have in all this? Does a person who has more than one wife necessarily cease to believe in Jesus as his Saviour? How can the church assert that such a person cannot believe in Jesus Christ? On the basis of the church's reasoning, a murderer and a thief can take part in the Lord's Supper, as long as they do not have more than one wife.

A recent report[22] by a committee of the Methodist Church of Ghana, under the chairmanship of Prof. Kwesi A. Dickson, approached this question with sincerity and clarity and it is fervently hoped that the thinking contained in the report will guide the church to see its way clear out of this muddle. The committee's conclusions are as follows:

a) Polygamy is not inherently sinful; the view that it is such cannot be supported from the scriptures.
b) There can be no justification for excluding a polygamist from holy communion which is a means of grace.
c) The marriage of converted polygamists may be blessed in the church.

[22] Report of the Accra District Synod Committee on Polygamy and the Lord's Supper, Accra, 1987. The indigenous churches in Africa are divided on the issue, some enforce monogamy but others do not.

d) However, since polygamy can be prejudicial to good order and faith, polygamists cannot be given leadership positions in the church.
e) Monogamy should be regarded as the norm, though in exceptional circumstances the church may permit a member to contract a polygamous marriage.

Christians and traditional offices

An important issue in the church, especially in Ghana, concerns the question as to whether Christians can accept traditional offices, such as chieftaincy. The Presbyterian Church has ruled specifically that a member who becomes a chief and has sheep's blood spilled over his feet cannot take part in the Lord's Supper, and such a person therefore ceases to be a full member of the church.

The church's position is that the Christian who allows sheep's blood to be spilled on his feet has indulged in a "fetish" or un-Christian rite, which makes him or her unfaithful to Christ, and undeserving as a full member of the church. Needless to say, there is need to raise some critical questions here, for there is clearly a gross misinterpretation at stake. The blood spilled over the feet of a chief is meant to cleanse the person who is being set aside for a high traditional office and is therefore a symbolic gesture of great significance. Furthermore, blood signifies life and with the shedding of sheep's blood, life is being symbolically given to the office which the person is about to occupy, so that it may continue to perform its unique role of keeping the traditional state functioning.

We need to remind ourselves of cultural practices in the Bible, such as anointing with oil, which was a Hebrew way of setting people apart for some high offices, and to stress that even though the Bible is the word of God, it is nevertheless culture-bound.

There are other practices which chiefs are by tradition expected to perform and it is necessary to study them and interpret them correctly so that we may discover where they conflict with biblical teaching, as we ourselves understand it. It seems to me that in this, as in other matters, European missionary teaching, rather than our own biblical interpretation, or the authority of the Bible as we understand it ourselves, has been our guide.

The church's attitude towards chieftaincy continues to pose a problem for many people who are qualified to assume such high traditional offices and to keep our traditional states functioning. By its unbending attitude, the church is subverting the efficient functioning of our traditional social organization because many qualified people refuse to accept the office of a chief or are afraid to because they do not want to be debarred from participating in the Lord's Supper and lose their full membership in the church. Again one may ask, does a person who has sheep's blood spilled over his feet automatically cease to believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour? It needs to be borne in mind that the only viable political institution we have been able to evolve is that of kingship or chieftaincy which has held our societies together.

It appears that most people join the church in order that they may have what they consider to be the "final honour accorded to a deserving Christian", namely that their corpses may be taken to the church before burial. And it is clear that the church, by its rigid rules and practices, has given erroneous encouragement to this false notion of a "final honour to a deserving Christian".

Christians are those who are allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper, and polygamists and chiefs or others who have had sheep's blood spilled on their feet and thereby become "backsliders" do not have full church burial and the funeral service takes place in their homes.

It is unfortunate that on the occasion of death, when the church should demonstrate the love of God to the bereaved family, and bring comfort and succour, it chooses to stand in the place of God to judge the righteous and separate them from the rest by not taking their bodies to the church. The least the church could do is to demonstrate that every soul is precious in the sight of God, and the church has no biblical authority to show that some souls are more deserving of "honour" here on earth than others.

Conclusion

The African church faces a plethora of social and ethical problems. The church ultimately can give hope in the face of despondency, courage in the face of shattering statistics, in the firm conviction that God's will will in the end reign supreme. If the church moves away from a seemingly inordinate obsession with salvation, evangelism and personal charity into the arena of life where the social and political imperatives of our present-day life impinge forcefully on our lives, then it will be bringing the message of the gospel to bear on our total lives and act out the life of our Saviour whose body was broken for all humankind, and it is only in this action that the meaning of Christ's life will become evident in our world.

Above all, theological education of the leadership of the church in Africa should be such as would reflect these existential concerns in order to build up a momentum towards their solution.

Renewal of Humanity, Unity of the Church and the New Thinking

Archbishop Kirill of Smolensk and Vyazma, Russian Orthodox Church

Renewal calls for unity

The renewal of humanity obviously implies that humanity is in a bad shape and needs to be changed for the better. Since we are dealing with humanity rather than particular nations or states, it also means that the problems that darken our life are global, and common actions taken globally can alone solve them. But common actions presuppose a unity. Here a fundamental question arises: in what sense can we speak about unity as applied to the whole of humanity? What does this unity mean?

There are several levels on which this notion can be clarified. The Acts of the Apostles states: "God has made of one blood all nations" (17:26). This affirmation gave rise to the well-known theological conception of the unity of the human race as one family tied by the invisible bonds of mystery. The ultimate religious foundation of such a unity lies in the mystery of the Trinity which reflects the fullness and unity of divine perfection.

However, this mysterious unity between people and between the human person and the Creator has never been and cannot be fully revealed in history; it is a promise to be fulfilled with the coming of the kingdom of God.

There is however an evidence of this mysterious unity which is expressed in the irresistible desire of people to form various unions. It is an axiom of our life that human personality can be realized only through communication with others. Isolated from others a human being cannot realize the fullness of life. Because of this, all human activity, both conscious and unconscious, has been guided in a way by the union with one's like, i.e. the implementation of the idea of mysterious unity in social terms.

True, the efforts for unity have often been made in our sinful world for very prosaic reasons and acquired distorted and sometimes even dangerous forms; nevertheless, they have not ceased at that to be expressions of general human desire for unity based on the same ontological root. Various theories and social institutions ranging from the communal system to the developed systems of state made more or less successful and sometimes totally unsuccessful attempts to realize human unity. If on the level of

family, clan, tribe or nation and state these attempts did produce certain results, on the higher level of interstate relations they almost always failed. Among the most vivid illustrations of this are wars of aggression and the consequent emergence of empires. The development of empires for reasons of ambition, profit, love of power and vanity and for strategic, political and economic purposes was also a distorted way of expressing the sub-conscious desire of people for unity, for the obliteration of state and other boundaries.

History has shown that this experiment was doomed. It failed because the imperial community was based predominantly on power, and such power could easily overcome the centrifugal forces generated by people's discontent over the inequitable distribution of material wealth and the suppression of enslaved cultures. It was only natural that the community of people built by power and maintained by the balance of forces should be unstable and short-lived. It is clear that the unity of humanity can hardly be expressed and maintained within the framework of one state, at least in the visible future.

What then does the ecumenical call for the unity of humanity mean? How can we describe this unity in terms understandable and convincing not only for Christians but for all people? How can we communicate the biblical message of the unity of the human race without ignoring the stark reality of the modern world? In the context of this reality one should use a more restrained language, at least when we speak to the non-Christian world. The idea of the "unity of humanity", ambiguous as it is today, should be better adapted through concrete and realistic concepts. Only then will the Christian message have a chance to be heard in our divided world.

In defining these concepts we should proceed from the fact that the threats hanging over humanity today, being global, are *real threats for all*. There is no fairy-tale oasis in today's world; therefore, the global crises should be overcome together, *by the whole of humanity*. It is a well-known fact that in the face of an external threat a state grows in its internal unity and cohesion. If such were not the case, the state would have little chance to withstand the enemy. It is the whole of humanity today that has come to face common mortal enemies, the whole civilization that has found itself beseiged; for the first time in history the eternal question "to be or not to be?" is posed globally. In the face of these threats humanity has no alternative other than to unite. Therefore, the unity of humanity which needs to be achieved already today is the unity of actions in the struggle for general human survival. It should be clearly realized that such a unity is a pragmatic one, that it is far from fulfilling Christian aspirations, and it is rather a first step on a long road. It is also clear that without the first step maybe the road itself would not exist.

The principal difficulty in uniting humanity in order to overcome the crises that threaten it lies in the nature of the crises themselves. These crises are not external; they are caused by human beings themselves. In the past they were treated according to the well-known pattern: a state or a part of the world used to solve its problems at the expense of other states or parts of the world. This kind of "therapy" was always applied from the position of strength. It was the strongest who won. Such was the basis of world policy. Among its driving forces was national egoism clothed in the guise of national security. The reality of an interdependent world today has revealed the total untenability of such a policy. Every attempt to improve one's situation at the expense of others has only resulted in an illusory advantage aggravating the crises and endangering not only those who are weak but also those who are strong.

Unity requires a common world outlook

In other words, humanity should learn to overcome together the threat it faces, following a new principle: respect for the interests of each is a condition for meeting the interests of all, just as the security of each is a condition of security for all. The statement of this principle, however, will immediately raise the question of criteria. What do the interests and security of each mean? Indeed, nations and states may have quite different ideas concerning these notions. In other words, combined actions aimed at the solution of problems facing all humanity should be based on a common world outlook.

But is not the idea of the common world outlook utopian? In fact, the great diversity and sometimes conflicting nature of existing world outlooks make its realization extremely complicated. At the same time, there are promising signs suggesting that humanity in the face of the threats it faces is beginning to realize the need for some *common principles for all* which, transcending ideological, religious, national and class interests, would constitute an authentic basis for unity.

In order to understand what criteria can be used to describe this basis an attempt should be made to clarify what the present crises have in common. Let me mention only those which are most dangerous and widespread:

— the arms race which has absorbed enormous resources, aggravated economic disproportions, exhausted natural resources, and increased the risk of a nuclear war;
— ecological disaster which becomes ever more evident from year to year as the human environment cannot sustain the consequences of the development of science and technology and the wasteful exploitation of natural resources;
— hunger which causes more deaths than wars and points to economic injustice;
— poverty in large parts of the world which, on top of the enormous foreign debt, constitutes not only an economic problem but also a challenge to any attempt to secure global political stability.

One should add to the list such problems as racism, sexism, violation of human rights, social injustice, which taken together provide a terrible picture of oppression in the world today.

All these crises have developed against the unprecedented progress of science and technology, progress which the romantics of the past considered to be a panacea for all troubles. The "technological euphoria" still prevailed in the 60s,[1] but in the 70s the mood became more realistic. The power crisis (1973) with all its economic and political consequences proved the vulnerability of the contemporary scientific and technological civilization and its dependence on resources which were no longer considered inexhaustible. By the 70s even those who were euphoric began to speak about the need for "changing the course", for a "conscious clarification of the rules of community life" and for an "agreement on the principles of shared life".[2] The debate involved a profound reflection on the moral state of the contemporary individual and society.[3]

[1] See K. Steinbuch, *Falsch programmiert*, Stuttgart, 1968.
[2] K. Steinbuch, *Kurkskorrektur*, Stuttgart, 1973.
[3] Noteworthy in this regard was the WCC world conference on "Faith, Science and the Future", Boston, 1979.

Actually, as a result of scientific achievements, humanity's triumph over the forces of nature, the human being now faces the threat of self-annihilation. The future of life itself depends now on the way in which human beings will use their power. The development of science and technology has in a sense provoked the escalation of crises, becoming their material driving force (the arms race, ecology), and in certain parts of the world a force of oppression (transnational corporations). It would be appropriate to quote here the Russian religious thinker N.A. Berdyaev who said as far back as 1932: "... when such a terrible power is given to the hands of man, the destiny of mankind becomes dependent on his spiritual state".[4] Science and technology have given us today an opportunity to do good or evil on a truly cosmic scale, involving in our activity the forces of nature. But good and evil are moral categories; they belong to the inner being, revealing themselves only through human actions. Are not then the troubles in the world the result of the internal diseases of humankind? Do they not witness to an ever-broadening gap between the intellectual and the moral state of the world? The advance of science and technology has provided human beings with a more comfortable life. The absence of established moral standards has made them seek more comfort and material wealth using their increased power.

Common moral principles as basis of unity

As is well-known, where moral values are neglected, individual welfare is stressed to such a degree that the interests of others, even of human life, are completely ignored. This is the case today; it is the spiritual and moral essence of various crises in the world. One can say that the crises reflect the violation of the harmony of being achieved through realization in human life of the absolute moral values. One should say, therefore, without diminishing the role of well-known political, economic, historical and other factors which determine the character of the present crises, that their primary causes lie in the realms of the human spirit, in the field of morality. If so, humanity should unite in the struggle with these crises *on the basis of common moral principals*. In other words, the world-view to unite human spirit in the struggle for survival should be described in moral terms common to all.

Besides that, the moral content of this world-view seems to be the only thing possible and attainable today. And the reason is the unique, universal and absolute character of human morality,[5] in spite of apparent differences and diversities.

The purely rational and pragmatic approach to the ordering of human society has resulted in a lesser concern for morality in social life. The error of politicians, scientists and lawyers was that they actually separated politics, science and law from ethics. The moral order was referred to the realms of "good intentions", beneficial advice and instruction. Christian churches which for years emphasized mostly the

[4] N.A. Berdyaev, "The Spiritual State of Modern World", *Put*, No. 35, 1932, p.59.

[5] True, the integrity of human moral consciousness has been challenged until recently by some thinkers. As an argument they referred to the diversity of moral codes among people who live in different social, cultural and economic situations. But it is generally accepted today that despite the diversity of the codes, ethics is capable of establishing one goal in the behaviour of all creatures and one system of values. Existing moral codes appear to be only different parts of the same whole (see N. Lossky, *Conditions for the Absolute Good*, Paris, 1949). On the basis of various ethnographical studies one can come to the conclusion that "all fundamental moral ideas underlying the Ten Commandments are a common property of all men..." and the moral codes of diverse nations proved "sufficient material for the inductive justification of the truth of the integrity of human moral consciousness".

personal dimension of ethics, contributed in a sense to the creation of an atmosphere which conditioned the "ethical secularization" of social life. The sad experience of the past as well as the present crises is a convincing testimony to the fact that social and economic relations, politics and science cannot stay apart from ethics.

However, the degree to which moral standards are applied in social relations is dependent on the level of people's moral development. Without the ability to distinguish between good and evil, without the feeling of duty and responsibility, without the self-control and self-limitation of the human person a healthy social life is unthinkable. From personal morality stems what Russian religious philosophy described as "natural law". This law establishes a certain rational and just order which in a given situation is fully correspondent with the moral nature of the human person. The wisdom of such an order is measured by the degree to which the highest moral principles are realized in the activity of society. The idea of "natural law" stems from the principle of the wholeness and integrity of human morality. It presupposes an intimate link between the personal and the social. Personal ethics and social ethics are inter-related. S.L. Frank puts it this way: "These two spheres have an inner link between them. This link is formed by that stratum of human life which can be designated as the sphere of morals, way of life, moral practice... It is through this intermediate sphere that the general legal order or legislation that standardizes the general order of corporate human life becomes ultimately the expression and product of the personal spiritual life of members of the society and of the degree of their moral perfection or imperfection."[6] "The level of social order stands in functional dependence on the moral level of people comprising it."[7] Hence Frank comes to a conclusion which lies in the mainstream of the moral conceptions held in Russian classical literature, particularly in N.V. Gogol and F.M. Dostoyevsky: "The way leading to the maximally effective and stable results is the way from inside to outside i.e. from personal life to social life."[8]

The moral integrity of society consists in the moral integrity of individuals, and this dependence is crucial to human survival (AIDS has made this dependence clear to most persons). Evil is dynamic and its logical end is death, i.e. non-existence. If evil is not prevented on every level of existence, it will multiply and ultimately destroy the world. Evil brings chaos and deformity — the "Dionysian principle" which scholars today describe as entropy.[9] The preservation of life calls for spiritual courage. It is evident now that a person who has lost his or her moral and spiritual link with others and nature is globally dangerous. The evil that such a person does with the power of science and technology ceases to be his or her personal affair.

This interdependence of morality and survival is a significant discovery. More than a hundred years ago, Dostoyevsky stated as a confession of his Christian moral beliefs: "Beauty will save the world." Indeed, there is only one force that can arrest the growth of evil and stop the entropy of the world. This force is the good that is done by each and all together. Never before have people had such a strong reason for avoiding evil and doing good. Today the reason is physical survival. If you want to live, do good; if

[6] *Light in Darkness*, Paris, 1949, pp.378-379.
[7] *Ibid.*, p.381.
[8] *Ibid.*, p.379.
[9] The Dionysian principle should be understood in the spirit of the classical Greek philosophy, without the romanticized symbolism of Nietzsche.

you want to live, live according to the moral standards which God has laid in the foundation of human nature and which are identified as the standards of general human morality. There is no other way to survival. "What is peace?" asked St Gregory of Nyssa and answered: "It is nothing else than the fulfilment of love."[10] The moral principle should become a categorical imperative in both personal and social life. It should motivate international relations and the progress of science and technology. Moral values should be made the highest priority in solving problems which arise in human history.

Towards a universal moral standard

Coming back to the theme of the unity of humanity in the face of crises threatening it and recognizing that moral standards are not only means for overcoming these crises but also the basis of unity, I would like to underline once again that this conclusion is dictated by human moral nature itself. V. Solovyev, a well-known Russian philosopher (d.1900), maintained that despite all the diversity and the uniqueness of every human person "there is an indissoluble foundation of general human morality which should be the basis of every considerable construction".[11] The search for a universal moral standard to express the very essence of human moral nature should become a subject of universal dialogue, with the participation of all religions and ideologies; the existing plurality of moral codes should be replaced in a nuclear age by one moral code *based on the absolute moral standards*. Through a comprehensive dialogue humanity can rid itself of the incompleteness and one-sidedness of every particular code and come to a consensus on the basis of an agreed system of values. This system should also establish the relationships and interdependence of values[12] and explicit priorities. The one moral code should have as its principle the idea of *the integrity of absolute moral standards, the organic inter-relation and interdependence of personal and social moral ideals*.

The universal moral code has to become the basis for defining our approaches to the solution of international problems today. In this sense, it can be called a new international moral order. The members of the religious section of the International Forum (Moscow, February 1987) worked out some proposals for such an NIMO which were later elaborated by the Round Table Conference on Common Security and Moral-Ethical Values convened by the Moscow Patriarchate in March 1987. In formulating the major principles of a new international moral order, participants clearly expressed the need for a "*global humane moral structure* to become the basis of national and international human relations". According to the participants in the Round Table, which brought together distinguished theologians and scientists, a global moral order, while leaving room for diversity, should be based on a comprehensive consensus between nations and states. Underlining the special role of religion in achieving such a consensus, the Round Table stated: "They (religions) have been traditional stewards of moral values; they have had a major role in shaping the consciences of persons and societies, and in witnessing to the inviolable nature of moral values and standards. Religions should bring fresh creativity to the formulation

[10] *Works*, Part II, Moscow, 1861, p.458.
[11] "The Primary Qualities of Morality", *Questions of Philosophy and Psychology*, 24/4, 1894, p.36.
[12] As was done, for example, by the WCC Vancouver Assembly as it treated peace and justice and tried to define "security".

and inculcation of new moral principles regulating the life of nations with each other."[13]

Among the major implications of such a moral code for international relations would be an opportunity for articulating universal criteria for the assessment of such notions as national interests and national security. This, in turn, could contribute to the implementation of the only principle which is acceptable for international policy in a nuclear age: *respect for the interests of each is a condition for meeting the interests of all; security of each is a condition of security for all.*

Security based on the moral order would exclude fear and suspicion, egotism and distrust. The interdependence of nations and states would be the best incentive for building confidence. Moral standards, being included in social life, would help to solve the problems of political, economic and social justice, to secure authentic respect for human rights and for the pluralism of convictions and to break barriers between the East and West, North and South.

The establishment of one moral code through a comprehensive dialogue between all religions and ideologies should not involve a *syncretic confusion* of existing ethical concepts, which would diminish or supersede the truth. But this will not happen for the reason that one moral code will not be a compromise between different ethical conceptions, but the jointly agreed basis of general human morality rooted in the moral nature of the human being. For the same reason it cannot differ from the principal values of the gospel ethics as the latter represents a reflection of natural moral law planted by God in human nature. Christians, just as representatives of other world religions, will have an opportunity to express through the universal moral code their commitment to the eternal moral truths. Such a code will humanize politics and law, while preserving the plurality of socio-political convictions, economic systems, cultural identities, traditions and national customs.

The new thinking as an ethical concept

The implementation of the moral code will have to confront difficulties of two kinds. First, there are theoretical problems involved in the formation of a corpus of universal moral standards. Secondly, there are practical difficulties involved in the realization of these standards in the life of contemporary humanity. As far as theoretical difficulties are concerned, the challenge here is not only to find out whether the standards of general human morality exist in principle or whether they are absolute or relative, but also to achieve consensus on the moral assessment of problems facing people today.

Thus the traditional policy based on national, class and ideological interests and on recognition of these values as the highest ones is being replaced by a *new thinking* in which priority is given not to particular but general human values. In this regard it should be emphasized that the new thinking, at least in the interpretation which has developed in the USSR in the process of *perestroika* (restructuring), is essentially an ethical concept. It suggests a certain development of the classical Marxist conception of morality. Without challenging the origin of the theory of ethics as was interpreted,

[13] "Common Security and Moral-Ethical Values", report of the 5th Round Table Conference, *Information Bulletin* of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, No. 4, 1987.

for example, by F. Engels,[14] the new thinking does recognize the existence of general human standards of morality and emphasizes the importance of these standards for politics and social life today. Thus, according to M.S. Gorbachev, "nuclear powers should step over their nuclear shadow to a nuclear-free world, thus putting an end to the alienation of politics from general human standards of ethics... In order to 'humanize' international relations it is necessary to take appropriate actions in the humanitarian field as well... It can create moral guarantees of peace, thus contributing to the elaboration of material guarantees."[15] The new thinking combined with general human moral values seems to answer the mood of the people: "The new thinking with its humane general human criteria and values has penetrated various sections of the population. Its power is in its consistence with the popular wisdom."[16] The recognition of the fundamental importance of general human standards of morality is among the major features of the new thinking, opening up broad prospects for dialogue. Noteworthy in this regard is the proposal made by Gorbachev for the establishment of a world consultative council under UN auspices. It could bring together "the intellectual elite of the world" including outstanding scientists, politicians, authors, artists and church leaders in order to "seriously enrich the spiritual and ethical potential of world politics today".[17] This proposal in itself is an invitation to a broad dialogue.

It should be noted that the ideas of a new thinking have emerged in the USSR at a time when people displayed a serious concern for personal ethics. The atmosphere of *glasnost* has contributed to discovering a clear inter-relation between human morality and a number of social problems. Literature, cinematography, representational arts and journalism have responded energetically by integrating moral-ethical issues with the restructuring of social life. It is interesting that Marxist philosophers also share the idea of the interdependence between personal ethics and social relations. "An ultimate idea should be not only social but also personal in nature; it should encourage a person to overcome isolation and egotism and to seek the ideal."[18]

In other words, the concept of a new political thinking, just as the concept of *perestroika*, is oriented to moral values and in this sense presents an encouraging sign of a growing awareness of the importance of general human ethics in a nuclear age.

Convergence in the Christian world and inter-religious relations

Another sign of hope is given by the developments in the Christian world. I am referring to the growing consensus on the problems of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Despite the continuing confessional differences, the ecumenical movement witnesses to the ripening of a consensus on the theological and ethical assessment of these problems. Such a consensus, if achieved, will be a contribution not only to Christian unity; it will help in formulating the general human moral assessment of the major problems of today.

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[14] *Anti-During*, Moscow, 1936, pp.107-108 of the English version.

[15] "For a Nuclear-free World, for Humanism in International Relations", address at the Kremlin to the participants in the international forum "For a Nuclear-Free World, for the Survival of Humanity", 16 February 1987.

[16] M.S. Gorbachev, speech during the ceremony of the presentation of the Lenin Order and the Gold Star Medal to the city of Murmansk, *Pravda*, 2 October 1987.

[17] "Reality and the Guarantees of a Safe World", *Pravda*, 18 September 1987.

[18] M. Antonov, *Perestroika and World-Outlook*, Moscow, 1987, p.166.

A special place in this process belongs to the Vancouver Assembly. It was important because it summarized in 1983 the road covered by the ecumenical movement since the Stockholm conference in 1925, defined the points of an emerging agreement between the churches and brought up the idea of involving the churches in a "conciliar process of covenanting for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation". It expressed the unity of the churches in rejecting nuclear arms, nuclear war, deterrence and the use of weapons of mass destruction. It is important that the rejection was based not only on pragmatic but also on theological and ethical arguments. It is also important that it stated the need for Christians to renew their commitment to unity in the face of the various threats to peace and to elaborate a holistic approach to the solution of today's problems. If the process of JPIC really fulfills the aspirations of the Assembly and the confessionally divided Christianity comes to unity in assessing the problems of justice, peace and the integrity of creation theologically and ethically, it will mean that a first step has been taken towards a universal moral code. It is very important however that the reflection on JPIC should include the theme of the integrity of the human person, that the biblical idea of unity and wholeness of the standards of human morality should be reflected in a holistic treatment of the personal and the social, the individual and the global.

Among other promising signs is the development of inter-religious relations. The Moscow inter-religious conferences (1977 and 1982) and the annual sessions of the Round Table, and the activity of the World Conference on Religion and Peace have made it evident that the moral-ethical problems in the context of the present global crises are the area where the dialogue has been most successful. The Moscow Forum revealed the deep concern for these problems on the part of many scientists, politicians, authors, physicians, artists and businessmen. It so happened that the moral-ethical problems were the focus of the discussion, and it was not accidental that the religious section, which had in it 215 representatives of all world religions, adopted unanimously a final document entitled "Appeal for Joint Efforts". It is explained by the fact that in the face of crises an agreement on ethics tends to come much ahead of agreement on other matters. Christian and ecumenical bodies maintaining a dialogue with other living faiths and ideologies should take moral-ethical problems seriously and put them on their agenda.

We spoke of the practical difficulties involved in the implementation of a universal moral code. It is generally accepted that Christianity, which did have in the past a corpus of ethical standards, has failed to implement them not only in social and international life but also in the personal life of many people. It is unnecessary to point out that the pagan world left Christianity a grave legacy of slavery and despotism. It is also clear that Christianity mitigated the atrocities of slave states and contributed to humanization. Nevertheless, it failed to do this in full measure either in Byzantium or in medieval Europe where, though there was one moral Christian code, life was plagued by wars which were sometimes religious.

In this regard one should pose another dramatic question. Are the present crises exclusively those of the non-Christian secularized world? Or do they have to do with the inner life of Christianity? It is evident that Christians do share the destiny of the world. One should not make it appear as though everything was all right in Christianity and the present developments had nothing to do with the situation in Christian society. It is clear that Christians are also responsible for the world. Today's problems are

connected not only with the decline of faith, but also the internal diseases of Christianity in its human rather than grace-giving and mystical nature. The cause seems to lie not in Christian ethics, but in the quality of Christian life itself. H. Kung was right in saying that "if there are too few changes in the world, the blame is to be put not on the fundamental programme of Christianity, not on the Christ himself, but on Christians!"[19]

The importance of Christian unity

The moral and spiritual renewal of humanity should begin with the Christian environment through Christian commitment to the standards of the gospel ethics, through the organic combination of the personal and social dimensions of Christian ethics in everyday life. One should not accept the distorted situation where fundamentalists preach personal morality while ecumenists are left in charge of social morality. To emphasize one at the expense of the other involves a division of essentially indivisible moral standards, thus distorting Christian life and weakening Christian witness.

One should probably say at this point something about Christian unity. Something strange seems to be going on in the ecumenical movement in recent decades. This strangeness is felt most acutely when one reads reports of the early ecumenical conferences. What an enthusiasm one comes across in those papers of sixty years ago! They breathe a spirit of youth, power, passion. They are filled with both joy and pain, with both longing for unity and sorrow over division. Why has this dramatic element in the ecumenical journey disappeared? Maybe we are too overwhelmed by the lack of results. But something else seems to have happened to the consciousness of Christians today, especially that of "professional ecumenists". Indeed, we have undoubtedly made some progress in practical cooperation. Ecumenical gatherings, worship services and joint studies have become part of the life of our churches. Maybe it is this kind of progress that has caused a weaker concern for unity. Maybe we have become too much accustomed to our fellowship without unity. Our prolonged cooperation without unity appears to have healed the external signs of the disease. As Father Sergius Bulgakov, a participant in the Lausanne conference (1928), excellently put it: "One cannot reconcile oneself to the division of the Christian world; one should feel wounded by this division in one's heart."[20] The wound does not seem to hurt as much as it did at that time. Maybe the broad cooperation among Christians in practical areas has relieved us of the pain. Probably, some sixty years ago Christians could not even imagine how much could be done together, as their children and grandchildren do today, without restoring our unity. It proved to be possible. But how far is this joint work effective without unity? The very service and life of the churches bear the stamp of division which it is impossible to conceal by singing together from *Cantate Domino*, or by unanimously adopting resolutions. Can Christianity make its own contribution to the unity of humanity, being still divided and participating in the life of the world not as One Church but an ecumenical fellowship? The answer cannot be in the affirmative.

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[19] *To Be a Christian*, Russian edition, *sino loco, sino anno*, p.926.
[20] "On the Lausanne Conference", Put, 13, 1928, p.79.

But maybe such unity is an unrealizable hope? If it was not possible in the past to reach unity of nations and states on the basis of one moral code of Christianity, why should the idea of the unity of humanity on the basis of general human morality be taken seriously today? If the ecumenical search carried out for decades and with great enthusiasm has failed to lead to unity, why should we be optimistic about the future? There can be only one answer: because never in history has the question of unity been put together with the question of survival. It is human division including the division of Christianity that has led our civilization to the brink of destruction.

It seems however that there is one necessary condition for achieving the unity of the church and renewal of humanity. This condition is repentance. Repentance — metanoia — is transformation of the old order of life and spirit; it is the realization of untruth and its rejection; it is *perestroika* in the deepest sense of the word. It was probably not accidental that the film "Repentance" by a Georgian producer, T. Abuladze, should become a major event in the cultural life of our society at the very beginning of the process of *perestroika*. The film reminded us of the tragic events in the recent past of my country and helped many of us to realize that without the rejection of untruth, however painful that rejection may be, there cannot be change for the better either in the present or the future. There is in repentance not only rejection but also affirmation. Repentance is true renewal, the fulfilment of truth, the restoration of Beauty and Truth. There is in it not only humbleness, but also daring. Repentance is a spiritual exercise performed for the sake of the renewal of life. Can the renewal of the world be achieved without spiritual struggle, without turning to eternal moral values?

"Tell me, does this street lead to a church?" an old woman asked the heroine of "Repentance". "No, this street does not lead to a church," she replied, knowing what she was speaking about, for that street reminded her of the tragic events of her childhood, and the church — a symbol of eternal spiritual values — had been blown up long ago. The last words of the film are those of the astonished old woman: "What is this street for then, if it does not lead to a church?"

An Analysis of Church and Society Social Ethical Writings

James M. Gustafson

Apart from a short paper written for the Geneva Conference books I have not been active in WCC groups since the Faith and Order conference in Montreal. Thus I come to this literature very much as an outsider. There is, no doubt, an inner coherence and development in the work of the Church and Society division of the WCC that is clearer and more alive for those who have participated in it than is the case for one who has read much of the material casually through the years but not been integrally involved in its production. Paul Abrecht's paper read at the US Society of Christian Ethics makes this apparent. (In 1978 I heard M.M. Thomas give two weeks of lectures to a group of teachers of ethics from seminaries all over India on ecumenical social thought, and was impressed deeply with the way in which many things I had read suddenly had a breath and life I had not found in them before.)

In preparation for this paper I have read the complete run of *Anticipation*, a publication I had (except for a very few numbers) read only casually through the years. I have also read a variety of other reports from conferences, official documents and statements, and other miscellaneous items.

From various signals and instructions pertinent to my assignment I have forged an approach which draws on my own previous current work as an analyst of literature in Christian ethics. The intention of much of my work has not been polemical, but heuristic and pedagogical. Different patterns of analysis have been used with different bodies of literature and at different stages of my work. From among them I have had to choose what seems to me to be probably most beneficial for this assignment. They also overlap to some extent.

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One that I do not use to frame this paper is an analysis of "levels of moral discourse" and the relations of the levels to each other. Put briefly, in that work one can start with particular and precise moral critiques or moral prescriptions that are made; then ask what principles and values justify them and how they justify them; and then ask what "vindicating beliefs", theological views, etc., back or warrant the ethical prescriptions and moral values and just how they back them. Or the order can be reversed, beginning with theology. In this approach one looks primarily for coherence between theology, ethics and particular policy proposals or ethical critiques of states or affairs.

In another that I do not use here I distinguish between four base points and four sources for theological ethics. The assumption is that comprehensive and coherent theological ethics, in some way, touch all the base points and make defended choices among the sources. They also need an organizing perspective, metaphor, analogy, or principle. The four base points are: theological in a restricted sense, i.e. an understanding of God and God's relations to the world and God's purposes; the interpretation of the meaning and significance of human experience, historical life, events and circumstances in which humans act, and nature; the interpretation of persons or institutions as moral agents, and their acts; and the interpretation of how persons ought to make moral choices and judge actions and states of affairs in the world. The four sources are: the Bible and Christian tradition; philosophical methods, insights and principles; human experience broadly conceived; and scientific information and methods relevant to the issue being addressed.

Both of these patterns of analysis seek to identify coherence and incoherence in ethical writings, and also (the second particularly) the comprehensiveness of the writings. The Church and Society materials do not, as a whole, lend themselves to analyses in this way; they are diverse in theologies, ethics, interpretations of events and prescriptions, and none of them, quite properly, is fully systematic in character. Yet, while I do not pursue these two approaches in this paper, one could use them to assess individual materials I have studied. An interpretation and analysis of WCC documents in their light could have heuristic value, showing strengths and weaknesses, etc., in various ones.

For this paper I have chosen to use an agenda I am calling, provisionally, "varieties of moral discourse". I do this because, in reading for this paper, I was impressed with the varieties of moral discourse in the literature, and it is wider than will be developed in this paper. My most fundamental observation is that what is called social ethics in the WCC literature covers a lot of bases, addresses a lot of issues, is relevant to very different audiences, and is written in many different ways; greater self-consciousness about the differences in the literature, in the potential audiences, and in the purposes served might be clarifying and useful. Thus the paper addresses more formal than substantive matters in the literature. The structure of the paper is this: first, a brief description of the varieties of discourse I use; an all too brief analysis of literature I have studied in the light of the varieties; and finally some concluding observations.

Varieties of moral discourse

The principal and relevant distinctions are between what I designate as prophetic, narrative, ethical and policy discourse. The wider framework of the relations of theology, biblical materials, scientific and policy literature, etc., to ethics and policy is

involved in Christian writings in each. That wider framework is suggested above, but is not developed systematically here.

Prophetic moral discourse, as I use the notion, has the following characteristics. First, prophetic discourse takes two distinguishable forms: that of indictment and a more utopian form. Indictment shows dramatically and vividly how far human society has fallen from what it ought to be; see, for example, aspects of the eighth-century prophets. Utopian discourse proclaims an ideal state of future of affairs which functions as an attractive allure and can motivate communities towards its realization.

Prophetic indictment usually addresses the *roots* of moral and social waywardness, not specific instances in which particular policies are judged to be inadequate or wrong. Fundamental values or orientations of social life are the source of the fault. Prophetic indictment also uses vivid language and symbols to make its point, e.g. the language of harlotry in Hosea. Its language has a motivating capacity not found in more abstract forms of moral discourse. It evokes a sense of crisis or urgency. Utopian discourse is similarly vivid; it allures, it appeals to human idealism.

Prophetic discourse is legitimate and important, but not sufficient. It dramatizes; it undercuts meagre preoccupations about means to short-range ends; it stirs human moral sentiments. Rigorous ethical writings and policy statements cannot do that. But by being in focus on the root of the evil it cannot inform incremental choices made by persons and institutions where good and bad are commingled, and where "trade-offs" have to be defended. By being in focus on an ideal future, it often has little to say about means to shorter range ends in view.

The proponents of narrative ethics also make a correct point, but narrative is also insufficient. Put too simply, their principal contention is that narratives function to sustain common memory in a community; narratives shape the moral ethos of a community and provide its moral identity. Persons, by participating in a particular community, have their consciences or moral identity shaped by the narratives; their characters are formed by stories. There is another use of narrative moral discourse: stories, parables, etc., are used at the point of particular moral choices. Telling an apt story may provide more nuanced and subtle illumination at that moment than the conclusion of a rigorous casuistic argument.

Both of these uses of narrative are to be affirmed. But narrative discourse is not sufficient. The particularity of the story might impede discourse with those who do not share its authority; Christians in the modern world participate in several communities each with its own stories and myths; illuminating stories can inform the exercise of the virtue of prudence but need to be tested by more rationally rigorous moral discourse.

By ethical discourse I refer to more philosophically self-conscious and rigorous modes of moral argumentation. In Christian ethical literature its presence occurs in many places. There are those concerned to find the rational grounds of autonomous ethics which might be backed by Christian convictions but which can be shared with non-believers. Others argue that Christian ethics is, or ought to be, deontic or teleological, or of some other type modern philosophers have distinguished. One finds ethical discourse also in the practice of casuistry in which precise distinctions and syllogistic logic are used to prescribe particular courses of action. Ethical discourse requires precision in use of concepts, such as justice, rights, duties and ends; precision in distinctions between morally relevant aspects of circumstances and rigorously logical argument.

But it is not sufficient. In comparison with prophetic discourse it does not often locate the root of a problem or evoke a hopeful vision. Nor does its language have much motivating capacity. Compared with narrative discourse, it does not provide the symbols that shape an ethos, nor (at the point of particular choices) does casuistry evoke larger dimensions to be considered or imaginative responses.

Of policy discourse I want to highlight only a few of its many features. Whereas ethical discourse asks as the first question, "What ought we to do", in policy discourse the first question is likely to be, "What is going on?" Policy discourse seeks to determine what is desirable within the constraints of what is possible. At its best it is written from the standpoint of responsible agents and not external observers, i.e. it assumes the position of responsibility within enabling and limiting conditions. The range of necessary information and knowledge is broad; the assessment of power to affect change is crucial; the time frame for the achievement of ends is generally shorter and technical considerations are more prominent.

Policy discourse is necessary but not sufficient in Christian ethical literature. It places its own demands on authors in terms of knowledge, concepts, and understanding; it has to be concerned with loci of power to affect courses and action. But it necessarily works within limited visions, limited frames of reference. It accepts conditions which from prophetic and ethical perspectives might be judged to be morally wrong, or at least inadequate. The ethical informs but does not determine the choices of the policy-maker in most circumstances.

Before turning to more specific references to the WCC literature, I wish to note some general observations which will bear on the remainder of this paper. First, I take it to be proper that WCC social ethical literature intends to be persuasive; it has a practical end. Each of the modes of moral discourse I have delineated has a distinguishable intention; each perhaps has a different object of persuasion. The purpose of prophetic Christian discourse is different from that of ethical discourse or policy discourse produced by Christians. Prophetic discourse arouses awareness of the presence of an evil; it is exhortive in its effect. But, *per se*, it is not of much help to Christians in positions of policy responsibility in public or private sectors. Thus the question emerges: "For whom is the literature being written?" Who is the intended audience? Whom does one want to persuade? How are there four modes of moral discourse related to each other? (Different theological dispositions back preferences for different modes of discourse — that is the larger issue I cannot take up in this paper.)

Analysis of some WCC Church and Society literature

The forms of moral discourse I have distinguished are all found in the numbers of *Anticipation* and other literature I have studied, including the report from Potsdam. In some pieces one finds them all; other pieces tend to be more of one than the others. One could do a more intensive analysis than I do here and show how different pieces seem to be directed to different audiences; the argument and rhetoric would seem to be in the service of different purposes.

Prophetic discourse indicts and evokes a sense of urgency; it envisions a future and creates conditions of hope. There are many examples of each of these in the WCC material.

Certainly the impact of the Club of Rome analysis, which clearly shaped a good bit of the discussions over an extended period of time, was to evoke a sense of urgency,

indeed of crisis. In this case, as in some of Prof. Birch's papers on population, the sense of crisis was shaped by the accumulation of a considerable amount of data, and by extrapolations from it to anticipated future outcomes. One notes that such descriptions are always evaluative; the data are selected and shaped into a more or less coherent Gestalt which is, *prima facie*, persuasive. And one notes how certain models, analogies, or metaphors are used to shape the data: the systems analysis of the Club of Rome, Birch's use of Hardin's tragedy of the commons, etc., are examples of this. Any critical response to such depictions requires the adducing of counter-evidences and/or a critique of the models and metaphors that shape them.

Indictment is also substantiated by the concepts used in the social analysis, and by the human values that are held to be at stake in different social analyses. Social, economic and political analysis impregnates a great deal of the literature. The responses to the historical event of the oil crisis of 1973-74 are examples of this. Indictments finally are in focus on particular agencies — nations, corporations, classes of people — whose attitudes and actions are judged to be the major causes of the evil or injustice under consideration. There is a kind of proportionality between the analysis and the courses of action prescribed or suggested to rectify the evil attended to. This is not novel or confined to WCC documents; it is present in the history of Western social ethics. A critical factor in the material I studied is the social analysis of the causes of the problems under discussion.

Clearly there is not unanimity in the literature about what information is relevant, what models or metaphors are appropriate to state a problem or a situation, what concepts and explanatory theses are to be used to diagnose the issue, and what values are threatened by the events under discussion. In this respect the WCC is no different from any other groups that seek to be responsive to perceived critical events in human life. Like any other group, to be persuasive the WCC has to marshall the best analysis possible to make its indictments stick and to evoke a proper sense of urgency.

To be sure, the literature proceeds from the urgent indictments to suggestions or presciptions for action. The logic is, "if... then..." And the courses of action prescribed or suggested are proportionate to the crisis portrayed. One of Roger Shinn's contributions through the years has been to remind readers how a certain diagnosis seems to necessitate a certain prescription, and that alternative diagnoses lead to alternative prescriptions.

There are utopian notes as well as indictments. Dr Laeyendecker-Thung's analytical paper from Potsdam has a strong statement about the need for utopian notes (p.34). In *Anticipation* No. 13 (Cardiff report) there is a section, "The Utopian Vision: in Search for Alternatives". Its most utopian statement is: "We envision a world community in which war is only a memory and in which we respect the delicacy of the biosphere, honour the rightful claim of every child and adult on the world's good, and promote the participation of all persons in making social decisions" (p.3). This seems to function as a heuristic device to help persons see what is really needed and desirable. Various aims are inferred from this vision which provide possible ends in view that are applicable to contemporary conditions.

Although the theological appeals to the coming kingdom of God are not described in detailed expectations of an earthly future of human wellbeing, there are numerous invocations of hopeful eschatological themes. My impression is that the prophetic indictments are generally substantiated by evidences and arguments from current

events; the sense of crisis is not engendered by the use of biblical prophetic rhetoric. The signals of hopefulness, by contrast, are generally based upon biblical theological themes about God's promise, or a kind of openness of the future. To this reader the contrast is glaring, and perhaps it is intentional; that the world is something of a mess can be demonstrated by analysis of current events and society; few evidences for grounds of hope are drawn from the social data, analyses and extrapolations. The major evidence for hope has to be drawn from biblical theology.

The prophetic discourse in the WCC literature has an important, legitimate, but limited function. It evokes a sense of urgency, and provides images of hope. It appeals not simply to the rational faculties of the readers, but also to their senses of injustice, moral indignation and moral aspiration. Prophetic discourse motivates action but is not sufficient to direct it. One cannot move from prophecy to policy without the mediation of more specifically stated ethical principles and human values. Intuitively some persons seem to move with swiftness and ease from indictment or moral vision to propose courses of action; others with greater care, consciously interpose other modes of moral discourse between the prophetic and the policy. The questions I wish to raise for discussion are these. Has the WCC sometimes assumed it has done its social ethics when it has been prophetic? When it has not assumed that, has it been sufficiently self-conscious of what is required, and how to proceed, to move from the prophetic to the social ethical and to policy recommendations? Has it always been sufficiently self-critical of the evaluative descriptions which specify the ills it addresses?

Narrative discourse has two principal functions: to sustain the identity of the community through memory of its traditions and thus provide its perspective on issues, and to suggest courses of action in particular circumstances. I shall briefly note some examples of this.

What I (loosely) call narrative in the material under analysis functions primarily to call the Christian community to its distinctive sources and heritage, and thus the object of the address is the church. A good example of this is Dr Heino Falcke's paper in the Potsdam report (pp.74-80). The point of such a paper is not to provide a basis for ethics which can be shared with the secular world but to show how the concerns of JPIC can be grounded in and informed by the distinctive source of the life of the churches, the Bible.

A different use of a different type of narrative is Kosuke Koyama's essay, "Theological Reflections on the Bamboo Room and Oil Room", in *Anticipation* No. 16, pp.8-13. Here the story-teller discloses two types of mentality, the "curved liturgical mind" and the "straight technological mind". For him the mind of Christ, the biblical mind and the mind of history are curved, slow and dialogical. What is the function or effect of such a narrative? It is not to back ethical principles which can be applied to policy. It presupposes that its audience is disposed to respond to the narrative as it draws from the biblical material as well as material indigenous to East Asia. It seeks to show an alternative way of thinking and living to the dominant technological model. Like Falcke's Potsdam paper, but in a different way, it appeals to those who are loyal to the Bible and the Christian faith and its persuasiveness is dependent on that commitment.

The second function of narrative (perhaps we can call it parabolic or exemplary) is also present to a lesser degree in the writings I have studied. There are descriptions of the activities of persons and institutions which are persuasive and action-guiding by

virtue of their suggestiveness. Without adducing evidences for this I wish to comment on its significance. Insofar as an intention of the Church and Society literature is not only to encourage certain kinds of activity but also to provide some morally worthy and religiously authentic backing for it, perhaps more use of narratives as exemplary illustrations would be possible. The applicability from one context of activity, e.g. a place in Africa, to another context would take place by a process of analogical thinking rather than by abstraction from one example to general principles which in turn would be applicable to the other. Put more simply, stories of how the biosphere can be respected which incite what my colleague David Tracy called "the analogical imagination" might have more significant outcomes than extended theoretical discussions of the theological and ethical principles for such respect. The answer to the question, "what ought we to do?" might be the narration of what persons have done in similar circumstances, rather than application of generalized and abstract principles or concepts.

The particular strength of narrative moral discourse is its specificity, concreteness, or absence of high-level abstraction. It takes seriously the communal character and the historic traditional character of the church. It gives continuity and shape to the moral ethos of the community; while other factors also shape ethos, narrative does sustain memory of the founding events of the church and of its continued life of both unfaithfulness and faithfulness. Certainly it is important for the WCC to aid the churches to vivify the stories and symbols which nourish and provide some guidance to the concerns of JPIC. (It is here that evangelization and social concerns and liturgy and social concerns have an important connection.)

But narrative is not sufficient for social ethics. Nor do the writings I have studied assume that to be the case. It is not as easy to move from the Christian story to answer the question of what ought to be done in issues of intervening into nature as some persons might think. But narrative can nourish the attitudes of respect for human life and nature and provide symbols for portraying the significance of occasions and events in which we act.

As examples of possible courses of action narratives are important — as I stated above. But it is proper in the intellectual moral life of the church to make ethical, indeed casuistic, arguments for the propriety of one story in relation to another.

The questions I wish to raise for discussion are these. Are the Church and Society publications sufficiently clear about what audience is the object of the forms of discourse, and particularly narrative discourse? Or, within the varieties of discourse, about what narrative can most effectively do as a persuasive form of address compared with policy discourse? (For purposes of space I do not develop here the ways in which narratives can function prophetically both to indict and to enlarge moral visions.)

Ethical discourse is philosophically self-conscious and rigorous in its modes of argumentation. In the literature under study one looks for clarity of concepts, such as justice or the common good. One looks for relevant distinctions within general concepts such as justice, and for precision in their use both in the analysis and in the recommendations for action. Most Western moral philosophers and most Christian ethicists who concentrate on philosophical issues would find the Church and Society material to be grossly deficient in the technical aspects of ethics as a philosophical discipline. If that deficiency is intentional one would like to see some justification of it.

Since the J in JPIC stands for justice, and since the word justice is widely used in the materials, I shall look at it briefly. My impression is that in much of the usage the assumption is that its meaning is self-evident. The first and most precise discussion of the term that I found is in *Anticipation* No. 15 (1973), p.11. "The moral principle of justice must have priority. Justice means neither a 'principle of merit', i.e. distribution in proportion to certain meritorious behaviour (intelligence, thrift), nor a 'principle of objective equality', i.e. a distribution whereby everyone attains an exactly equal amount of good life. It means a *principle of needs*, i.e. a distribution whereby all people are accorded an equal means of realizing a maximum of good in their lives in relation to their capacities and particular requirements." This, of course, invokes some (but not all) of the traditional material distinctions used in the application of the formal principle of distributive justice as it is stated in the form of "equals shall be treated equally". The paragraph goes on to distinguish between *wants* and basic *needs*.

Certainly the implication of most theological discussions through the years is that a needs-based view of distributive justice is normative for Christians. And there are places which describe what those needs, or "qualities of life", are. Some arguments might be brought into sharper focus. One is a direct and precise argument from theological premises for the needs-based view of distributive justice. (A section on "Some Theological Issues" follows immediately the paragraph from which I have quoted, but its contents do not refer to this issue.) A strong and clearly focused theological argument that grounds or backs the needs-based view of distributive justice is required to support what seems to be regnant in most of the literature.

A second argument might develop with greater precision the ways in which this needs-based material concept of justice is applicable to policy alternatives. Application is made, but the steps are not clearly lined out. For example, is it incumbent on the WCC to think about needs as a primary basis for justice but then also to think about merit, etc., as secondary requirements in order to achieve some approximation of the primary concern? Is some structure of society which distributes according to some principle of merit a necessary condition to motivate activity and production that serves the criterion of need?

A third kind of argument comes to my attention. In *Anticipation* No. 19 (Bucharest report), we have a different operative use of the term justice. "Justice *means* awareness of the authentic interdependence of people and of people with their natural environment. Independence, in the sense of liberation from the oppression of others, is a requirement of justice. But independence, in the sense of isolation from the human community, is neither possible nor just" (p.5). Justice, another sentence states, includes nature as well as society. An academic is prone to quibble about this kind of statement, but I hope in a way that is helpful. Independence as requirement of justice might be based on a deeper principle of need, but such is not adduced here. The larger issue is the relationship between a more or less factual assertion, i.e. the interdependence of people and of people with nature on the one hand, and the application of a principle of distribution on the other. The section goes on to describe the existing aggregates of power in society. "In such a situation it becomes important to emphasize two complementary themes. First, some traditional freedoms, whether of individuals or social classes or nations, must be subordinated to the common good. Freedom to oppress others, freedom to threaten the environment, freedom to act recklessly, become extremely dangerous. But, second, freedom of conscience and freedom for

creativity become increasingly precious to people who feel themselves reduced to fragments of powerful states or business corporations. The maintenance of some harmony between social responsibility and personal freedom is an issue in all societies."

This section does not have a very clear and precise ethical argument. Its elements seem to be: (1) A common-sense ontology of interdependence is invoked which issues in a notion of common needs (I do not quote that above). (2) The importance of the common good is elevated. "Common good" is an important concept, but one that is notoriously difficult to be precise about. (3) There is an implied but unexplicated notion of the relation between justice and the common good in this material. (4) Just why it is important to emphasize the two complementary themes is not clear; one can think of other conclusions that could follow as well. (5) The final sentence might more clearly have been stated as follows (though my statement is hardly felicitous): Common good requires "some harmony" between personal freedom and the requirements of social responsibility, and that harmony must be regulated by criteria of distributive justice.

My point is that this argument would be clearer and more persuasive if greater care had been given to what constitutes a good ethical argument.

Good moral arguments, in my judgment, can be mixed arguments in the sense that one can combine, e.g. arguments from a principle of justice with arguments made from anticipated outcomes of activities in which judgments are made about their benefits or harms. In *Anticipation* No. 13 (Cardiff reports), pp.9-11, we have a basically consequentialist analysis and argument. The first part "defines" resource limitations, the second part is a comparative analysis of risks involved in alternative approaches after asking whether we should "generally act as though currently known reserves were the only ones available". The third part is a brief statement of assessment of various social consequences. My point is not that a WCC document should justify the use of consequentialist modes of ethical argument so that it answers the philosophical criticisms of that way of thinking ethically. It is, however, that consciousness of the issues of this mode of argument should be evident and taken into account in its use. I believe this would add to the persuasiveness of the material to critical readers, whether in the churches or in positions of policy-making.

Further specifications of matters of ethical argumentation in the material would be redundant. The larger theological vindications for using different forms of ethical argument is a matter from which I prescind here, though theological literature about ethics makes arguments for different positions (e.g., contrasts between Barth's ethics of the command of God and traditional Roman Catholic natural law ethics are based on different theological backings, and not simply justified preferences for alternative philosophical ethical theories).

One cannot move from prophetic and narrative discourse to policy recommendations without some intervening kinds of arguments, and ethics provides those. But an ethical argument informs but does not determine the choices of the policy-maker in most circumstances. When one is thinking about policy the desirable is always considered within the conditions of what is possible. If one empathizes with those who seek the good under the conditions of finitude, i.e., the possible, some policy recommendations I have read are, indeed, unrealistic, e.g. *Anticipation* No. 19 (Bucharest), p.13: "The establishment of a global progressive income tax levied and

re-allocated by a transnational body to form the basis for a world that insures the security of the individual."

Policy discourse deals with the possible; it requires information and analysis that is different in its specificity and foci of attention from more purely ethical discourse and from prophetic and narrative discourse as well. There are many pages of what is basically policy discourse in the material I have studied. After the oil crisis of 1973 and during its concern for nuclear energy the Church and Society material is replete with policy discussions which take into account alternative data bases, attempt to make refined distinctions of preferable alternatives, etc. Much of this material simply repeats what was, and is, available to the reader of both technical scientific literature and policy literature of these matters — e.g., *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* through these years provided very similar analyses, with similar alternative courses of action argued for and against.

The policy-oriented literature from Church and Society through the years has different purposes, some of which are explicitly stated and some of which are implied. In some cases there are statements of general aims and objectives of policy with limited technical information about how those aims can be approximated and limited specification about the agencies in society which ought to be doing something to approximate them. In most cases, to show that relevant scientific and policy information and concepts are taken seriously, the writings are very technical and replete with distinctions. It is not easy to justify a policy preference on moral or theological grounds. In one case there is a proposal that the WCC should begin with the quandaries that scientists and policy-makers have, and work from that base in the development of its literature; i.e. David Jenkins's contribution, "Problems of Biology and the Quality of Life", in *Anticipation* No. 10, pp.21-29. "It is... proposed that the starting point for our investigation should be the prima facie problem-generating developments in some field or fields of the biological sciences" (p.22). Here the practice of science both in its research and applied dimensions is the initiating impetus for theological and ethical reflection.

Consciousness of the ambiguities in relying upon technical expertise in the policy discourse is present. Indeed, efforts clearly have been made to invite contributions of persons who have different technical assessment of issues and different technical recommendations for policy. In this respect the WCC is in the same ambiguous position as any other groups that make specific recommendations of policy: on which technical data and interpretation does one rely? A practical question is that of the degree of specificity that recommendations from Church and Society ought to have, and what is the objective of specific recommendations. To whom are they addressed?

Conclusions

My purpose in this cursory analysis has not been simply to demonstrate the presence of the four varieties of moral discourse. To do only that would be trivial if it did not provoke further reflection on some questions I have raised. What are the relations between these four modes of discourse, in individual WCC materials in which all or most of them are present, and in the larger task of research and writing in Church and Society? Are there appropriately different audiences for the literature, and thus appropriately different modes of discourse relative to these audiences?

I risk being presumptuous in the following suggestions. The persuasiveness of Church and Society literature to some readers, at least, would be stronger if different tasks and aims of different writings were clearer. I take it that there are two general audiences for the literature: the principal one is the member churches of the WCC, the other is those publics that are in positions of some power and authority to determine courses of action in human society. In this respect the literature has foci similar to those in papal social teachings and in the documents of various conferences of Roman Catholic bishops on issues such as the economy and war and peace. These two general publics have some overlapping membership; persons in the Christian churches participate as agents in the determination of policy and action. This overlap includes not only persons of unusual power and influence, but Christian citizens participating through electoral practices and through voluntary associations.

The schema of this paper has modest heuristic purpose; I would suggest greater clarity of purpose, indeed, self-conscious statements of the purpose in the following ways (some of what I am suggesting is clearly present in the literature):

1. Work that is clearly diagnostic of the issue deemed important enough for a study, with the prophetic intention to stimulate a persuasive sense of urgency about it among the members of the churches. Some of Prof. Birch's papers would be good examples of this. My impression is that there is not a significant difference in the technical aspects of the diagnosis between those done by Christians and by others who publish in secular journals of opinion.

2. Work that through narrative and theological presentations makes a persuasive argument or some other form of presentation to show why Christian believers, by virtue of their faith, ought to be concerned about such issues. Here one assumes a loyalty to the scriptures, the tradition and the community; one seeks to be persuasive by appealing to that loyalty. This kind of work functions to develop backing not only for the concern, but also for the dispositions and attitudes appropriate to the issues under discussion. As I indicated above, Falcke's article in Potsdam is an example of this.

3. Work that develops quite rigorous ethical arguments based on defended values and principles pertaining to the selected issues. This should recognize the distinction between ethical and policy discourse that I have indicated. Such ethical argument can inform but not determine the choices of persons making policy. There are different procedures for this kind of work; a time-honoured one in the ecumenical movement is that of middle axioms introduced by J.H. Oldham and developed by John C. Bennett. But that is not the only one: Karl Barth's concession to "practical casuistry", Reinhold Niebuhr's dialectic between love and justice, the revisions of the natural law tradition developed by Roman Catholics or by K.E. Kirk, and others are also possible. I would argue that choices among these, while ultimately grounded in different theologies, should be a practical matter for Church and Society, i.e. which is persuasive to the intended audience. If the intention of Church and Society literature is more pedagogical than prescriptive, then its ethical materials should be judged by their efficacy to teach and inform churches and persons about how to think ethically about the issues.

4. Work in policy ought to be illustrative since policy has to take into account quite specific contexts and technical information. There is merit in arguing out the policy implications of theologically informed ethical positions, but there is also merit in distinguishing between the degree of certitude one has between these two. For

example, the American Roman Catholic bishops, in the Pastoral Letter on War and Peace, consciously distinguish between matters of ethical principle and the inferences they draw for policy; they are more certain about the first than the second. The use of papal social encyclicals often, at least implicitly, makes a similar distinction; the more particular outworking of the policy implications (at least in some of the encyclicals) has to take into account various particular social, national and cultural circumstances.

This paper is more a formal than a substantive analysis of Church and Society materials. I have not done justice to the substance of any of the writings, nor have I noted many praiseworthy features of the literature.

Review Article

Christian Faith and Capitalism

Ronald Preston

After its last Assembly in 1983 at Vancouver, the World Council of Churches formulated a proposal for a conciliar process of mutual commitment by the churches to pursue justice, peace and the integrity of creation, with the prospect of a world meeting of church representatives in 1990 on the theme prior to the next Assembly in Canberra in 1991.[1] Ulrich Duchrow has been a consultant of the WCC in the early stages of work on this programme and his book *Global Economy* may be seen as reflecting the thinking of the WCC.[2] Its importance lies not only in this but also in the fact that it is addressed in the first instance to the church of Western Germany and then to all the churches in the relatively rich first world, of which those in Britain are clearly a part. I shall deal first with Duchrow's analysis, then with his proposals, and after that I offer a critique of his book.

I

The churches in the "West" are captive to idolatries of wealth and power. They bolster their position by a neo-Lutheran distortion of the doctrine of the "two kingdoms" or "two realms" to maintain that the church should be a-political because of the autonomy of the kingdom of this world from theological and ecclesiological criteria and control. By contrast Duchrow wants the basic economic issue of today declared a *status confessionis*. This term originated in the Formula of Concord (1577) to differentiate matters vital to the Christian faith from those indifferent (*adiaphora*), such as the vesture of ministers in conducting public worship. It refers to vital matters

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[1] See *Gathered for Life*, the report of the Vancouver Assembly, ed. David M. Gill, Geneva, WCC, 1983. The full story of the origins of the JPIC programme is obscure as there is in fact little about it in the report of the Vancouver Assembly. Much remains to be done to elucidate it, especially the phrase "integrity of creation". The term "conciliar" is being dropped, since it has a technical ecclesiological sense, particularly to the Orthodox, which does not suit what is intended; "covenant" is being used instead.

[2] *Global Economy: a Confessional Issue for the Churches*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1987.

which concern the cause of Christ himself and the very being of the church. It was never used in relation to a political issue until Bonhoeffer raised it after the Nazi government was established in Germany in 1933 and began the persecution of the Jews. Bonhoeffer did not in fact carry the Confessing Church with him on this. The Barmen Declaration of 1934 (which was the basis of the newly formed Confessing Church in resisting the "German Christians" favoured by the Nazi government) does not refer to the Jewish question or, indeed, to any specific issue; it remains at a general level of theological assertion. The Confessing Church confined its resistance on the Jewish question to the internal life of the church; for instance if a Christian of Jewish descent were not to be permitted to worship with those of Gentile descent. It did not concern itself with the vicious treatment of Jews generally. Duchrow wants to expand the concept of *status confessionis* beyond the internal life of the church to the public forum, but he says it only makes sense to do so in respect of political questions when neo-Lutherans say that the political and economic area has its autonomous rules and so is a matter of indifference from the point of view of Christian faith.

A *status confessionis* is derived from the Bible and the creeds. When used in this wider area it removes the issue from being a supposedly political or economic option on what would lead to a better society, and makes it one of Christ versus anti-Christ or God versus an idol.

Apartheid provides a recent illustration. In 1977 the Lutheran World Federation meeting in Dar-es-Salaam took the view that to support it is equivalent to the anti-semitic stance the "German Christians" took in the 1930s. It is a heresy and it belongs to the confession of Christians to say so. In 1982 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches meeting in Ottawa took the same view and suspended two Dutch Reformed churches in South Africa for supporting it, reducing them to observer status.[3] Once a *status confessionis* is declared, according to Duchrow, it leaves those who disagree to exclude themselves, but this is not what happened at Ottawa, which went further. This minimizing gloss by Duchrow helps to give a greater plausibility to his plea to extend the range of the concept, the usefulness of which I shall query later; if one is going to expel churches which disagree one has to be on *very* sure ground, and this reduces its wider usefulness in dealing with the uncertainties in political and economic issues.

Duchrow wants the proceeding extended. He thinks we could be near to declaring the toleration by Christians of weapons of mass destruction a *status confessionis*; he suggests in passing that it might be applied to the domination of nature by humans; and he wants it applied to the "Western" economic system. He says it is totally perverted; it is dominated by international monopolies; it has promoted a system of neo-colonialism by which the rich get richer and the poor poorer; it is a gigantic conspiracy threatening the continuation of life and human dignity; the language of Chapters 13 and 18 of the Book of Revelation is needed to describe it; the demon needs exorcising.

II

Duchrow's proposals, after this drastic denunciation, are very general or surprisingly mild, or both. He sees that we need practical proposals for our situation and

[3] The Dutch Reformed Church of Africa and the Dutch Reformed Church.

that we cannot, for example, just take over those coming from Latin American liberation theologians. In general his proposals are concerned with the life of the church. In writing of the church Duchrow refers to (1) local congregations, (2) universal churches, (3) discipleship groups, and (4) regional churches. His general stress is on the third as the source of initiatives and new life-styles, but presumably only the second, and perhaps the fourth, could declare a *status confessionis*, and this creates a gap between his main proposal and the element in church life on which he concentrates. These pioneering groups — "single issue" groups would be the nearest secular equivalent — are indeed vital to the life of the church, but there is no problem connected with them. A live church will continually produce them; they will come into being and fade away as the empirical situation changes. Duchrow says in passing that they should cooperate with secular groups but does not discuss the matter further, or the problems which arise when they do so; or the comparative importance of church pressure groups as against the activities of lay folk in their jobs, their families and as citizens in the total witness of the church on social and political issues and in social structures. Indeed he finds the chief signs of hope in newly emerging communities in the monastic tradition, but gives no examples of where they are or what they do. There is a suggestion of sectarianism in this which does not fit the situation of the mainline churches in the "West". The tougher problems remain with the other three elements in Duchrow's division, not with discipleship groups. Duchrow criticizes the Roman Catholic bishops in the USA on their pastoral letter on the US economy for being too hortatory in trying to persuade the powerful to surrender power, but does not explain how the "emerging communities" or discipleship groups are to do it. A thorough examination of the possibilities of the churches as change agents at all four levels is needed. Some sociologists of religion think that they cannot be, except through individuals or Duchrow's discipleship groups, and that they delude themselves if they think they can. The issue needs discussing.

Duchrow echoes Bonhoeffer's plea for a church without privilege. It should introduce "a structural equalization of burdens with third-world churches" but no clue is given as to what this might imply. Within a "Western" church there should be an elimination of salary differentials, the creation of simple life-styles and new forms of community. The church "should withdraw legitimation from existing structures and establish countervailing power", but no indication is given as to how this is to be done and what it might mean in terms of new structures. The church should show more confidence in "the principles of conflict management based on the New Testament, Canon Law and the ecumenical experience", but no clue is given on what these principles are. Most surprising of all, after the polemic against the economic system we are told that a complete rejection of the market system is not required but a reduction of its range of influence. If this had been followed up it would have opened the way to the discussion of a whole range of detailed issues which are of immediate importance, and modified the significance of the main thesis of the book, but it is not.

It is not possible to say more about Duchrow's proposals because he does not elaborate them in any way. I go on therefore to mention inadequacies in what he does discuss, the chief being his treatment of autonomy, and the limitation of the *status confessionis* as a procedure in dealing with political and economic issues.

III

In doing this I see that I am in danger of being accused of defending the indefensible. For this reason I append my credentials in a footnote.[4] Let me say here, however, that I agree that Western mainline churches are overwhelmingly middle-class institutions; they are bound up with the success of the present economic system, as are any organizations with contractual obligations such as pension funds and trade unions for example. I agree that the most stubborn resistance to change occurs when economic interests are at stake. I agree that a "preferential option for the poor" is embedded in the gospel. The question is, how best to exercise it in our present situation? I think that a good deal of mileage can be made in testing out the implications of Leonardo Boff's fifteen marks of a church on the side of under-privileged classes, which Duchrow quotes but does not develop.[5]

Duchrow's targets are often too easy. Restricting "autonomy" to meaning a-political is an example. He is good at demolishing a spurious a-politicism. Political theologians and others have shown that it is not possible to be a-political. Politics is a sea in which one cannot help but swim. Individuals and churches who think they are being a-political in fact are tacitly supporting the status quo; and they are doing so irresponsibly because they have not thought it out, or naively in assuming that to support things as they are is to be a-political but to criticize them is political. The question is, how best to exercise political responsibility? The churches are criticized quite rightly by Duchrow for being fearful of explicitly acknowledging this realm lest they create disunity in the congregations, and thus spoil the fellowship; or for fear of losing funds as, for instance, in the case of West Germany the church tax. Churches must learn to live with different answers among their members to ethical issues. Apart from ideological factors, which gospel insights should bring under scrutiny, differences will arise out of the inherent uncertainty in the assembling and interpreting of empirical data. Churches must do much more in helping the formation of conscientious judgments on ethical issues and in creatively handling conflicts of opinion on them within congregations. Otherwise they condemn themselves to tacitly supporting the status quo.

The importance, however, of autonomy lies elsewhere. It is that theology is no longer the queen of the sciences, as it once claimed to be. In order to understand as Christians what is going on today we need the help of natural and social scientists in association with philosophers and theologians. The sciences have a proper autonomy which must be respected. For instance, medical ethics cannot be investigated without medical folk, but it is too important to be left to them. This does not prevent the presuppositions of the various sciences being scrutinized, as those of philosophers and theologians need to be; for example the nature and status of the value of efficiency in economic theory. But it is no longer possible for theologians or church authorities to

[4] Since reading economics as an undergraduate of the London School of Economics, I have been in the "democratic socialist" tradition. A few years ago M.M. Thomas, with whom I had much to do when we were both young men in the World Student Christian Federation, referred in a public lecture to my continuity in this respect. My preoccupation has been to ask what it means in the changing situation. In my formative years the three who exercised most influence on my thinking were R.H. Tawney, Reinhold Niebuhr and William Temple.

[5] Leonardo Boff, *Church, Charism and Power*, 1985, pp.117-123.

lay down in advance the conclusions to which the practitioners of the various sciences must come by imposing on them the parameters within which they must work. The influence of Luther has been decisive in this though he was often inconsistent in his life-time. Duchrow overlooks it entirely.

In attacking neo-Lutheranism he does not allow for the fact that all theological positions can be abused. He relies a great deal on the Barmen Declaration, getting much more directly from the text to specific ethical conclusions than its general nature warrants; it can be, and was, interpreted in a pietistic way which he would abhor. The doctrine of election has been used by the Boers in South Africa to justify themselves. There is much to be said for the doctrine of the Order of Creation, or Mandates (Bonhoeffer) or Provinces (Barth) or whatever term is used, and it has often been too easily dismissed because it was abused, as if other doctrines had not been. The Ansbach Recommendations of 1934 (rightly criticized by Duchrow) are an example of abuse for they explicitly added race to the basic God-given orders. There is no biblical or doctrinal justification for this, and no scientific evidence to support it. It is doctrinally heretical and empirically false. The general question the churches have to face is, why have varied theological positions so often been distorted in favour of the status quo, and how can they guard against this?

Duchrow is too simple in writing as if the only argument against the *status confessionis* approach is that it will split the churches. In fact the main doubt, as I shall shortly discuss, is the paucity of issues of such a black-and-white character as to make it appropriate. Again he is too simple in assuming that those who allow some place for nuclear weapons think that they are thereby "defending Christian civilization". The fact is that there is practically unanimous agreement among Christian moralists that the *use* of inherently indiscriminate and disproportionate weapons cannot be justified in terms of traditional Christian wisdom as embodied in the Just War doctrines (so in practice it has become a *status confessionis*). But that still leaves the problems of the best way of living with what cannot be disinvented, of what policies to adopt with regard to weapons that can be used with discrimination and proportion, of how to prevent a military conflict escalating into the use of immoral weapons, and how to prevent a destabilization which would make such a military conflict more likely. It is a question of the *human* future, not of defending Christian civilization.

Again, it is easy enough for Duchrow to criticize the moral majority outlook. But the only other alternative analysis to his own that he includes is that of the lay USA Roman Catholic group which published an alternative to the Pastoral Letter of the RC bishops on the economy. Some of their points need answering; Duchrow quotes but does not attempt to refute them.[6]

I now turn to the proposal that the question of the "Western" economic system should become a *status confessionis*. Duchrow thinks the term should be restricted to the neo-Lutheran "heresy" or similar ideologies. Certainly a theological criticism of ideologies is necessary, theological self-criticism included. Most ideologies will prove to have both good and bad points from a Christian stance; some will prove so opposed

[6] *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy*, the lay document in *Towards the Future: Catholic Social Thought and the US Economy*, 1986.

to it as to warrant condemnation. Apartheid is an instance. But detailed policies are not the same thing. "Separate development" for blacks cannot be ruled out in every case; indeed it has been demanded by many blacks in the USA to enable them to build up a countervailing power base, and "liberal" minded Christians have been much exercised by this. Many tricky and inescapable questions remain even if a *status confessionis* has been established.

What of the economic system? I myself think the ideology of the free market is un-Christian, as distinct from the market as an institution. Duchrow apparently agrees. It is important to say so because many Christians defend it. Indeed it is deeply rooted in Protestant cultures in a way it is not in Catholic ones. It could be declared a *status confessionis* but I am not sure how much that would help. It would not get us very far in dealing with the actual decisions called for in the economic realm, if only because the "Western" economic systems are a good way in fact from the free market considered as an "ideal type"; the black-and-white contrast obscures this. It makes Duchrow put the economic system in the worst possible light. At one point he says that its details must be mastered but for present purposes must be taken as read, and yet in Chapter 7 he goes into some detail. His criticism of the ideology of the free market is well done, the trouble is with his detailed analysis. He says (1) that the Keynesian as well as the neo-classical analysis is outmoded; (2) that welfare capitalism is becoming national defence capitalism; (3) that capitalism is in crisis and is no longer capable of operating smoothly or softly; (4) that there is a trend towards global fascism, described as "brutality interlocked with concentrated capitalism"; and this because (5) transnational corporations cannot be controlled; (6) China and Cuba are the economies to applaud (no reason given).

Against each of these assertions I would say that a plausible argument can be advanced. (1) That whilst the pure neo-classical analysis is discredited there is much of value in neo-Keynesianism; (2) that welfare capitalism is under attack from free-market ideologies in favour of a Gladstonian liberalism; (3) that capitalism could go far to operating more smoothly and justly if an individualistic ideology, shared by so many of the professional and working classes, would allow it to establish social institutions which helped individuals to cope with rapid technological change; and if the collective ideology of so many trade unions would allow them to see that full employment, stable prices and free collective bargaining are incompatible; also that capitalism so far from being in crisis is astonishingly tough; and the repeated claim in each decade by Marxists and neo-Marxists that it is collapsing from its own contradictions is falsified; (4) that the introduction of the term fascism darkens counsel, and reflects a Marxist misunderstanding of the nature of historic fascism; (5) that it is yet to be proved that transnational corporations cannot be controlled; (6) that it is bizarre to single out China and Cuba, and in any case they are not models for an advanced "Western" economy.

However, this is not the place to argue to and fro about these points but to ask why a systematic theologian has put them forward. The answer appears to be the nature of his sources, best epitomized by the neo-Marxist F.J. Hinkelammert,[7] and the study of

[7] I have reviewed *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, F.J. Hinkelammert, ET 1986, in *Theology*, September 1987.

transnational corporations by the WCC.[8] No other analyses are considered. Plainly a *status confessionis* cannot be declared on such a contentious basis. And the discussion goes no way to show how we are to proceed to the important task of reducing the range of influence of the free market.

At several points Duchrow mentions in passing that the Soviet style of economy is subject to much the same strictures as he is passing on that of the "West", but he never amplifies this. So we are left with a problem. If both of the "ideal" models of an economy offered to us are equally to be condemned, and the hybrid we know is dismissed as unworkable and getting out of hand, where are we to turn? No light is shed. All we are given is a reference to the historic struggle of "the people" for participation in power; this presupposes a uniformity in "the people" which the most rudimentary economic and class analysis of "the West" shows not to be the case.

Duchrow seems to be carried away by hyperbole. We are told that the body of Christ is divided between active thieves, passive profiteers and deprived victims. Are there not many in it who are committed like himself to the unity and renewal of the churches? It is said that there has been no book on economic ethics in German between that of G. Wunsch in 1927 and that of A. Rich in 1984; one thinks at once of the cogent section, for its time, in Emil Brunner's *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen*. It is said that the church exists not for itself but the world; one thinks at once of the worship of God but then finds that Duchrow in fact does allow for leitourgia, martyria, and koinonia as well as diakonia, though he does not develop the matter.

Two of Duchrow's positions are potentially serious. Luther's teaching on economic issues, particularly on the taking of interest, is commended from time to time. In fact Luther was hopelessly confused about the economic issues of his time (he was not alone in that), and his teaching on them has been aptly described as "the occasional explosions of a capricious volcano". In these matters he is no model for us. Then the concept "the responsible society" is called a middle axiom. It is not. This useful but confusing term must include some empirical judgment on what is going on, derived from analyzing the evidence, and deriving a recommendation at a middle level between a generalization and detailed policies. It is not an abstract concept like the "responsible society". The point is important if alternative methods in Christian social ethics are to be considered when the limited usefulness of establishing a *status confessionis* is realized.

IV

Some concluding reflections on Duchrow's book. In so far as one concentrates on what the church as an institution should be doing in this context much more needs to be said on how the church should choose which problems to tackle, what are the best

[8] E.g. *Transnational Corporations: a Challenge to the Churches and Christians*, 1982, and *Churches and the Transnational Corporation*, 1983, both published by CCPD. These have been subject to a good deal of criticism as being one-sided. Evaluating TNCs is a problem. I have no special brief for them. They are a conspicuous target, easy to hit and often rightly so. But they tend to be a scapegoat which lets others off scrutiny. The Church of England attempted its own analysis in *Transnational Corporations: Confronting the Issues*, Board for Social Responsibility, 1983, and arrived at two incompatible analyses which it could not resolve and printed both for consideration. There is in any case the possibility that the age of the TNCs is already passing; the revolution in information technology is making them redundant.

strategies, how to enlist the support of church members, where else to seek allies, how to cope with failure, or miscalculation or unexpected success, and how to move local congregations from taking up only relief or "ambulance" types of projects or issues.

Duchrow is not a moral theologian, and seems unaware of a good deal of careful interdisciplinary work in these areas involving moral theologians. He is a systematic theologian who has entered enthusiastically into an area where he is not sufficiently at home and fallen into the temptation of overcalling his hand. His book has gaps and unresolved inconsistencies, relies on too partial a selection of sources, and is not a good basis for helping us to make the detailed decisions in these areas which are called for. The method of *status confessionis* is too limited. It works only in extreme instances, as at "the gates of Auschwitz". It is also questionable whether an apocalyptic tone is a help to moral decision-making except in extreme "boundary situations". More of the prudence of wisdom is needed. Is it true, for instance, as Duchrow maintains, that there is an unprecedented level of brutality in human life today? Is it not that global communications have made us aware for the first time in human history of the extent of human brutality, and thereby increased the burden of responsibility on us? Power has always corrupted but it does not *only* corrupt. It has to be used. The strong always oppress the weak if they get the chance. Structures have to be devised to hinder them. The rich are indifferent to the poor, the well-fed to the starving, except in minor fits and starts. How can those in strong and favoured positions be challenged to alleviate the injustices of their own time? In particular how can churches influence their own plural societies? Short of an immense catastrophe such as an all-out nuclear war (and who knows what would remain after that?) complex "Western" societies are not going to change drastically or totally. The question is, in what direction should they move? Christian theology should help us to realize where we are blind, it should help us to see more clearly our range of choice, especially by enlarging our horizons (so that we do not take too narrow a view of what is possible), it should help us to live hopefully, and to cope within the body of Christ with differences of opinion on political and economic choices. Careful analysis of what is going on, a corporate task involving diverse talents, expertise and experiences, is an indispensable foundation for this theological task.

Ecumenical Chronicle

COMMONALITIES, DIFFERENCES AND CROSS-FERTILIZATION AMONG THIRD-WORLD THEOLOGIES

Editor's note: The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) had its assembly at Oaxtepec, Mexico, in December 1986, which was also its seventh international conference. Based on the meeting, a statement was issued recently. We publish selected passages from the statement especially pertinent to this issue of The Ecumenical Review.

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Context

5. EATWOT was born in 1976. In contrast to the years 1976-1981 which were boom years for the third world and provided much cause for hope, the years 1981-1986 have been difficult ones for most countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The first-world nations have regained their control of the international situation. In the third world the outlook has turned grim; the previous hope has slowly been dampened.

6. The programme for transfer of certain resources to the third world has been scuttled; the move for a new economic order, stalled; UNCTAD, stultified; the debt trap, made more sophisticated and set up far and wide; and repressive regimes, foisted on people. The first world's greatest success is the hold it has on an elite group right at the heart of the third world, which believes in first-world ideologies and schemes and runs repressive states for the benefit of a world oligarchy. The result is deepening and massive poverty, large-scale oppression and the vicious noose of external debts.

7. Theologians working for the liberation of the oppressed have had to confront the threat of the powers that be on two levels. (a) The secular powers from centres of domination have decided to attack liberation theology and basic church formations. (b) The administrative powers of Christian institutions concur. They are suspicious of third-world movements and liberation theologies. In the churches ecumenism and dialogue have weakened, and a wave of neo-conservatism and fundamentalism threatens to engulf the gains of recent struggles and insights. Attempts are being made to exercise repressive control over theological thought and over religious thinkers and organizations.

8. What is under threat is the joyful freedom to be faithful to the living word of the God of life. We realize that it is not easy to be a prophet or theologian in the third world. But opposition to our work also means that the voice of the third world is beginning to be heard at the centres of domination. That voice can no longer be ignored....

The theme

9. Our work centred on commonalities, differences and cross-fertilization among third-world theologies. Its goal was precisely to examine the common and diverse aspects in the theologies developing in Asia, Africa and Latin America in terms of theological issues, orientation and methodology, as well as the possibilities and need of mutual enrichment and cross-fertilization.

10. This attempt was only partially successful. Our conference reflected some aspects of the crisis of the third world. There have been some divisions among ourselves; the preparatory committee was unable to steer the conference to fully accomplish its goal. The host committee also had difficulties in the organization and preparation of the event at Oaxtepec. Although the quality of the position papers and the experience and competence of the participants were ample basis for an enriching and fruitful dialogue, the interspersing of general assembly business, such as elections and amendment of the constitution, precluded a more in-depth analysis of the conference theme and frustrated some of the participants....

Commonalities

...

13. Perhaps the most significant and unifying aspect of the third-world reality is the people's resistance to oppression, racism and dictatorships. The fundamental common fac-

tor on all our continents is people in search of dignity, meaning and fuller humanity. People's resistance to oppression may be silent or expressed in protests, organized movements or armed revolts. The struggle continues in South Africa, Namibia, Korea, Chile; it is carried on by Native Americans and Afro-Americans in the US and in Brazil; and by the landless, the dalits, bonded labourers, students, women everywhere. Traditional religions have become centres of popular resistance and a source of inspiration to sustained struggle. Traditional cultures strengthen people for the combat. A new sense of equality and dignity, a passion for freedom, and the searing memory of having been wronged and humiliated, cement the movements of resistance across nations and continents....

15. Third-world theologies are born of suffering and humiliation on the one hand and the will to dignity on the other. They are rebellion and protest against personal and social sin and against all forms of domination. They start from the people's painful experience of poverty and death. Commitment to and practice of liberation come first; praxis is pregnant with theory; theology articulates the truth of praxis. The starting point is the faith experience and description of historical reality understood analytically/intuitively as well as struggles for change in favour of the oppressed. The event of Jesus and the tradition of his movement are accepted and reread in the light of our sufferings, struggles, and faith experience.

16. We have common experiences as peoples facing socio-economic and political challenges. We EATWOT members have noted the role of foreign ideologies in our countries. We are aware of the economic dependency syndrome and the "per capita" income idea which only serves to mask the abject poverty in which the vast majority of third-world peoples live — with the exception of a few of the newly-developed countries. This is the most striking commonality of the third world. It raises the question of what humanity worships: the God of life or the idol of gold.

17. We hold in common the need to retain our church bases, in spite of their differences both as denomination and as regional expressions in their stance on the realities in which they find themselves, in their involvement in theology and in the liberation process, and in their responses to the situations on which we agree. We belong to these churches. For some situations that is an asset, for others, it is a challenge. However, we agreed that the church of Christ is God's instrument for the liberation of the human spirit for demonstrating the first fruits of God's reign. On this commonality we root ourselves in our churches and we pray that we, together and as individuals, become instruments of God's reign on earth.

Differences

18. EATWOT has defined itself in relation and contrast with first-world countries, culture and theologies. Because of the missions, old and new, our own regions have been influenced by those theologies and ideologies. But it is clear that Latin America is the most westernized of the three third-world continents and serves as an example of how complex this European Christian take-over has become.

19. Looking at the regions of EATWOT, one is struck by the similarities between Africa and Asia on the question of doing theology in a multi-religious context. Religio-cultural realities are strongest where traditional religions and cultures have resisted the European attempt to westernize the whole world. Latin American theologians have ignored for a long time the Native and Afro-American expression of religiosity and have been influenced by the middle-class culture, which is a minority in a vast and multi-racial continent.

20. From the very beginning there has been a different emphasis on the use and the quality of analysis for theologizing. This is an aspect in which we have perceived real progress in understanding the other's point of view. But still Asia and Africa are more challenged by their cultural and religious realities while Latin America, by the socio-economic situation of the people. In the last conferences (especially in 1981 at New Delhi and in 1983 at Geneva) it became clear that there are nuances in the understanding of poverty and the poor, which are the starting points of our theologies.

21. One of the most striking developments in EATWOT has been the challenge presented by some members to our common Judeo-Christian tradition. The living religions of Africa and Asia call for a conscious incorporation of theologies other than Christian into our thinking. This is especially true about Christology. It is impossible to accept that the majority of humankind would be deprived of the benefits of redemption and salvation. The Jesus of Nazareth should be expanded and

considered also as the total and cosmic Christ....

Methodology

27. It is in struggles for life that we encounter the God of life and discover a theological method. Our methodologies are not principles to be applied to reality; they are a guide to clarify our commitment and praxis. Our aim is not new doctrines, but new relationships and life-styles. Method implies a direction, and liberation is the direction.

28. Third-world theology is theology as if people mattered. Its concern is not the neatness of a system but the liberation of the people. It is not elaborated in the academy but developed by the communities of the poor. Through a spiritual experience the community makes the word of God its own and re-reads it. It is the people that have also the authority of the word....

30. Two main directions are to be found in Africa's theological responses. One relates Christian theology to African culture and spirituality, and raises radical questions about Africanization. The other, found in South Africa, places the accent on liberation from socio-political oppression.

31. In Asia the oppressed people, the poor, the Minjung, are the theological actors or subjects of theology in the measure in which they struggle against domination, and in the struggle discern God's supportive, imperative presence. Not all who do this are identified as Christians. Up to 97 percent of the poor of Asia are not Christian. The place of theology therefore is not only the church and its praxis but also the human community striving for liberation and life where the Spirit is at work.

32. Minjung theology expresses itself in people's stories and biographies as against Western logical systematic presentations. Western classical theology is highly academic like chemistry, and highly technical. Emerging third-world theology is of and for the vast masses of illiterate people. It will therefore be mostly unwritten, spoken, articulated in symbols, in folk songs, poems, myths, plays, art forms, dance and celebration. God is expressed in flesh and mystery.

33. Theology is latent in people's struggles; it has a period of gestation in the heart of the people. Its primary expression is the transformation we see in the life of women and men committed to justice and liberation. It is women's viewpoint that theology must be done with passion and compassion, with the heart, the body and the mind; it calls for a new language, one very different from the language of the academic. There is no need for third-world, non-literate theology to be apologetic. It need not be on the defensive. But it has to justify itself before the exigencies of the situation and before the masses of the poor, the children and the women.

34. In EATWOT, right from Dar-es-Salaam, there has been a long, and sometimes conflictive discussion on social analysis. Now the different positions have become less rigid and more supple. Latin Americans tell us that they have become more discerning. Analysis now is less dogmatic. Religiosity is integrated into analysis. Racism and sexism are recognized as distinct sources of oppression, not wholely reducible to economic factors.

35. Africans find Marxist analysis helpful in clarifying some aspects of reality, but add that African experience is different from Western capitalist society within which Marxism developed as a critique of its horrors. What we have in Africa is not merely capitalist alienation but historical annihilation and genocide. For Asia, Marxist analysis is not taboo provided it is contextualized and reinterpreted from a richer human perspective. A certain Marxist option is necessary to give to theology a new sharpness and concreteness. The US minorities admit to a new realization that racism alone is not enough to understand their oppressed reality. Colour and race are not the only relevant factors. The economic factor must be taken into account as is clear from the fact that an emergent black middle class refuses solidarity with the struggles of the community.

36. In sum, all of us have learned to show more respect and concern for people than for systems. Turning to people we have become more cautious of scientific theories. People's wisdom is a far safer guide. We have seen a second, non-analytical level of people's liberation theology spring up and flourish, and we have witnessed protagonists of the scientific analytical approach to theology becoming converts to the theological method of the people....

Theology, poverty and politics

...

38. Most of us live in capitalist countries. Our experience is conditioned by this mode of production. For over five centuries capitalism has operated on our continents as a culture of

death. It has taken religion captive to use it as a tool of death. It has been thriving on a global holocaust stretching from colonial conquest, plunder, genocide and enslavement to Auschwitz and Hiroshima and the carnage of World War II and continuing in the politics of death in South Africa, Central America, Western Asia, and other theatres of oppression. Religious reflection worth the name is bound to engage in a theological, and not only ethical, critique of this culture of organized greed and this cult of Mammon-Molech.

39. That should prepare us for a theological-critical hearing of the claims of socialism which has appeared on our continents as a hope-giving and enabling dream and as we step away from the death-system. Socialism has its failings which should not be minimized or overlooked, but its proven power to engender hope, and successful resistance to imperialism's armed might, and alternative social thinking deserve to be theologically considered.

40. Racism is a distinct form of oppression, insolently rampant in South Africa with the support of the West. Racist oppressors maintained our physical labour power while attempting to destroy us psychically, economically, culturally; to annihilate our identity, personality and dignity; and to reduce us to the status of animals and tools. This anthropological pauperization was carried in Africa and the US to the point of paroxysm. Anthropological impoverishment represents the tragic condition of black people, but it is applicable to all the third-world poor.

41. Racism is active in other parts of the third world as well, in the form of caste and untouchability in India, discrimination against Koreans as fourth-class people in Japan, harassment of tribal populations all over Asia, and marginalization and humiliation of minority groups in the US and Europe. In the Americas, the native peoples have the memory of massive physical destruction by European Christians. They have been nearly exterminated; they are the most oppressed of minority groups, pushed off their land, ignored, and made invisible. Afro-Americans remember that racism has been the fundamental justification for enslavement and oppression. Racists have sought to inject in the oppressed a feeling of inferiority and ineptness, and to stigmatize them as slaves in the depth of their personality, as a group meant by nature to be no more than a productive mass for the benefit of other races.

42. Part of this theological critique will bear upon the mechanisms of domination and pauperization. The third world, impoverished and trapped in debt, is bound to raise the moral and theological question of repayment and restitution. In a straightforward and honest historical view of things, who indeed owes what to whom? The vast sums owed to Western banks and governments is but a tiny fraction of the enormous wealth transferred from our continents to the West in the colonial period and continues to be transferred in this neo-colonial era through a variety of socio-economic mechanisms. The masses of the people everywhere are likely to see the point that the third-world is the creditor. It is to the religious sense and feel for fairness of the common people of the world that theology should make its appeal....

Dialogue with cultures and religions

45. We are wounded cultures. Our cultures have been colonized, attacked, devalued, distorted. Assimilation, negation, segregation, vandalism, school systems, technology and the invasion of the media were the weapons used to uproot, degrade and depersonalize our peoples.

46. But it is precisely in this area of culture that third-world peoples have refused to succumb. Africa and Asia have a keen sense of the vital role of culture. The dominant culture in Latin America is white and Western, but today Latin Americans are becoming more conscious that they come from a "mestizo" race and are "discovering" the existence and values of blacks and indigenous cultures in their midst. Culturally, the US minorities are third-world, but they are forced to be first-world citizens in imposed third-world conditions.

47. Colonialism has not been able to subvert our cultures but has succeeded in hurting them deeply and distorting them through an imported educational system and the capitalist process. A noteworthy factor common to our continents is that those who oppress and exploit the masses, who militarize and misuse power, who get our countries into debt and subscribe to frontiers, divisions and laws established by colonialists are people formed in a colonialist system of thought and values, analytical rationality and conceptions of economics and politics.

48. These persons moulded by the West's ethos and instructions have benefited by them and are only anxious to preserve them and the

whole state of affairs as left behind by the colonialists, instead of starting afresh from the people and their resources, needs, perceptions, decisions and possibilities. The battle between capitalist and socialist ideologies is a new cultural phenomenon on all the continents....

54. There is in Latin America a veritable irruption of the religiosity of the poor, popular religiosity, which was once criticized and rejected by a theological elite, but is now considered with respect. This has given rise to different religious experiences, the most significant among them being the Basic Christian Communities. Noteworthy is the rebirth of Afro-American cults, the black recovery of religion which is also a recovery by former slaves of their ethnic identity and human dignity, and a new appreciation of indigenous religious tradition. Emergent Pentecostal movements reject capitalist greed, fraud and affluence. There exists a deepening reflection on the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolution, and on the relationship between politics and the faith. Mention must be made also of religious movements coming from the USA which are fundamentalist and apolitical; and of the use of religion by the American leadership which opposed liberation theology and promotes conservative theologies and counter-insurgency religions....

Women's theological perspective

68. ... Women theologians of EATWOT had their own theological conference at Oaxtepec. That was an important moment from the programme launched at Geneva in 1983. There were national consultations held in preparation for their intercontinental meetings. This programme is intended to create space for women theologians to meet and share their experiences and views, to discuss the patriarchal elements in theology today, and to reformulate theology from the perspective of full humanity for all.

69. The women discussed at Oaxtepec several important issues. The affirmation of the oppression of women and the existence of liberation movements. Among the efforts towards liberation, theologizing emerges as a specific manner in which women struggle for the right to life. It was said that the Bible plays a vital role in the lives of women and in their struggle for liberation. Christology appeared to be central to women's theology. In the person and praxis of Jesus, women find the grounds of their liberation from all discrimination. The passionate and compassionate way in which women do theology is a rich contribution to theological science. Finally, the women made several recommendations to the leadership of EATWOT in terms of organization, content and publications....

71. It is not enough to be satisfied with numbers. The question is — they said — how are women's issues dealt with in EATWOT? What difference does our presence and the listing of our concerns make to the process of theologizing? Should not a different kind of theologizing happen because we are present? To the suggestion that men do theology in a deeper way "because we are here", the answer was that "we should not only complement men's theology but change the whole style of doing theology."....

Self-evaluation and plans for the future

91. The identity of the third-world theologian has to be defined in terms of political tasks, commitment to liberation struggles and sustained reflection on God's stake in history. Room must be found in EATWOT not only for the presence of women but for a distinctly feminist way of doing and articulating theology. The place of Marxist analysis had to be determined. A thorough debate is in order to make our socialist option clear instead of speaking vaguely of a third way.

92. Dialogue with other religions as God's partners and ours in the human-religious task of liberating the oppressed and constructing a new world is a felt-need at all levels of EATWOT. The presence and participation of followers of other faiths (and of secular ideologies) in our future meetings must be seen as normal, natural and necessary. Equally important is the presence and participation in our ongoing discussions and theological activities of non-academic people, of workers and of the poor.

93. Our work should aim at defining a total human perspective. Asians have challenged our Christian theology almost at every point: Christology and the "uniqueness" of Christ, evangelization, mission, church, the Bible as normative, theology as reflection on church practice, etc. They have led us to an appreciation of Revelation and Grace on the basis of the Spirit. We must open up to the massive challenge and promise of these vaster horizons. Our ecumenicity and our central concern for the poor demand this of us....

Book Reviews

Global Economy: a Confessional Issue for the Churches?, by Ulrich Duchrow. Geneva: WCC, 1987, 245pp., Sfr.15, US$9.50, £5.95.
Comfortable Compassion? Poverty, Power and the Church, by Charles Elliott. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987, £6.95.

The publication of these two books — which we consider of great importance in the ecumenical debate on social issues — invites reflection on how to deal with the fundamental problems relating to poverty in today's world society. The countries from which these books come have very different political and cultural histories, and very different ecclesiastical traditions. Do these differences prevent the development of a common European perspective on and attitude to the problems of world poverty? And even more important: do Duchrow and Elliott give new views which will enable us to rethink the ecumenical debate?

We will begin with the thinking of Ulrich Duchrow. His thesis is: the present economic world order is full of the smell of death. People die from hunger and starvation. This fact has nothing to do with God or with nature, but simply with the disorder of society. Churches and Christians are "watchmen" in the place of *Christus praesens*. The place "where we are to look for the *Christus praesens* today is the global economic system since this place is central for injustice, wars and destruction of the creation" (p.26).

Duchrow says that a theologian has to ask whether we should not choose life instead of death. He reminds us of Deuteronomy 30:19-20: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him." Duchrow continues: "Some theologians, including myself, are seeking, in the light of the New Testament doctrine of the body of Christ, to understand, analyze and influence the international economic processes and mechanisms which experience shows are already catastrophic in their effects and are becoming increasingly so with each passing day, costing every year the lives of roughly thirty million human beings" (p.47).

We want to commend Duchrow for putting the right question before us. As a theologian he has the right and responsibility to remind us of this fundamental choice. It is significant that he considers the question of human needs as of special importance for theological reflection; for example, he says that much of the talk of "free market is pure ideology. in the sense that this term rationalizes and disguises the interests of the more powerful participants in this life and death struggle" (p.156).

His main conclusion and question is the following: "If the first priority of the global economic system is no longer the satisfaction of the basic needs of *all* human beings, as the World Council of Churches, the Catholic bishops of the USA, and the alternative economists properly insist it should be, and if this global economic system takes for granted the death of millions of poor people as the price to be paid to ensure a 'better' life for the few, then the salient point would seem to be this: does the church champion *the life of all human beings and of the whole earth*, or does it side with the global economic system which at least tolerates and even automatically causes the mass death of so many and the destruction of the earth by the mechanisms so structured?" (pp.178-9).

No economist with a Christian background can deny the relevance of this question, and Duchrow's proposal to remove the curtain between the confessional speaking of the church and the world economic system must be taken very seriously. Here "neutrality" is sin, even heresy.

We restrict ourselves to two remarks on Duchrow's economic views. (1) Despite his comment above on free market, he states that it needs to be delivered from its "absolutism" in order truly to become a "*free* market": it "needs to be replaced within a broader context and become once more an instrument in the service of humanity" (p.158). This leaves the question of what has to be rejected and what

has to be set "free"; here further clarification is needed. (2) Duchrow needs to indicate what he thinks a market can and cannot do. For example: a market cannot, by itself, give a value to what does not have a price, such as nature or culture. A market cannot, by itself, give employment a higher value than the use of capital. Neither can a market give any priority to basic needs over luxury goods — everything depends upon one's buying power. Because of these simple facts, it is sheer ideology or idolatry for a culture to trust such an instrument to achieve happiness for all. For it will inevitably act like a tyrant, destroying what has no price, throwing out labour if capital gives higher financial rewards, deepening the poverty of those who have no buying power, and increasing the debts of the powerless.

There is a need for an economic system which starts from exactly those "interests", interests which have no defender in the market: the interests of the poor, of the unemployed, of the financially exploited and of the world of plants and animals. That is also at the heart of the justice, peace and integrity of creation (its preservation) sought in the WCC JPIC "conciliar process". A calculation made by the scientific council of the Dutch government has determined that, for the economy of our country, such a different orientation is possible. The presupposition — socially and politically — is a willingness to except concrete limitations in our "Western" level of income and consumption per capita.

We now consider the thought of Charles Elliott. Basically his approach and conclusions are similar to Duchrow's. He says, for example: "The poverty of 800 million, rising to one billion by the end of the century, is... *the outcome of a process*" (p.15); "...poverty is created and sustained by structures and structural relationships in society as a whole" (p.63); "the Western churches have failed to come to terms with the structural analysis of poverty at many levels — intellectual, ethical, political and existential" (p.69); "asymmetrical power is a fundamental, perhaps *the* fundamental, principle that maintains processes of impoverishment" (p.119). Elliott begins his argument with the churches' struggle against world poverty today. He explains how the development activities of the churches tended to be conceived and organized separately from, and in many cases in opposition to, the traditional missionary structures of the church. He strongly criticizes the churches in England: "If the British churches have largely... failed to detect the justice issues at the heart of institutionalized racism, it is not surprising that they have failed to see the justice dimension of the various structural problems..." (p.73). But of course it is not only these churches: "The churches, supremely in Germany and America, but also in Canada, Australia, Sweden and Denmark... had scented big money in development. So too, incidentally, had the World Council of Churches whose development agencies now became the money spinner for the whole of the ecumenical movement. The sources of this money were dominated by government" (p.36). His conclusion is radical: "A well-financed Church is not a critical Church" (p.37), and "the Western churches had become the agents by which Western materialism, Western modernism, was to be transferred to the developing world" (p.47).

This means that it is not possible to continue on this road. Let the churches stop thinking that projects can effect fundamental change in unjust social structures; on the contrary, they tend to *consolidate* unjust structures. (Here it could be interesting to listen to the experiences of the church-related bodies in the Netherlands regarding projects and contacts with basic communities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.) Thus Elliott calls upon the churches to look for another way to solve the poverty problem, which is *the* pre-eminent economic problem.

In comparing Elliott and Duchrow we note that although their conclusions are similar they differ in tone and background. Elliott uses very strong language; the title of his book is already an example of that, along with such statements as: "The churches have become trapped in a set of attitudes and institutions that sell short both the Christian Gospel and the poor of the world" (p.67). Elliott is asking for a radical reinterpretation of our situation, to include a dimension of the struggle against the "principalities and powers" which are the *spiritual essence* of the present economic system. A conversion of the church itself is needed, a conversion to the needs of the poor and the powerless. Elliott mentions a few examples of such conversions, which have become "centres of resistance": the Witness for Peace in Nicaragua and the Christian Institute of South Africa.

Elliott's book has a certain "evangelical" flavour; we are not quite clear as to his concept of the church. More importantly we have

two reservations about Elliott's work: (1) he goes too far in his generalizations and he pays no — or almost no — attention to more recent developments in the field of development cooperation. Not all, but many agencies are driven — under pressure of their overseas partners — into a sharper, more critical attitude to their own rich societies — not only to their own governments, but also to their own church institutions. Elliott's sketch is too rough. (2) No real alternative is even hinted at. Duchrow sees a path which could be followed, and we would be interested whether Elliott could join him. It is a pity that in his reflections on the churches and the WCC, the WCC sub-unit Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development is treated as quite insignificant. We feel that more could be said about its activities.

Both books bring us back to the findings of the WCC consultation at Zurich (1978) on political economy, ethics and theology. One of the conclusions of that consultation was "there is need for a new paradigm that would correspond to the operational requirements of a just, participatory and sustainable society and inspire a new understanding of the dimensions of poverty in the world and the demands of the Gospel". (Already in 1978 the consultation had come to the conclusion that the old paradigms have no solution for the problem of poverty — nor did they have any for the problem of the environment. The report on the Zurich consultation has been published in *Anticipation*, WCC, June 1979, No.26.)

It is time to resume this dialogue. Duchrow's and Elliott's books can provide excellent input. Time has come for new leadership on the part of the World Council of Churches; it is clear that this dialogue can be a fruitful part of the JPIC "conciliar process". This should include an examination of the question: why have the churches so far not succeeded in bringing their recommendations on the problem of poverty into public decision-making processes? It should also include the question: is Elliott's critical attitude regarding the British churches relevant for the churches in other European countries? A basic issue is: after the idea of the New International Economic and Political Order has been rejected, must the Christian community suggest a new strategy? And should we focus on a policy which emphasizes basic human needs? Here Duchrow has posed some urgent and strategic questions: "It is by no means clear who is chiefly responsible for the death of more than forty million people from starvation each year while a tiny minority of the world's inhabitants in the industrial countries and in the élites of the so-called 'developing countries' live in real or relative luxury. Who are the agents responsible for this obscene annual human sacrifice? How are they to be called to account?" (p.141).

There are many urgent questions! What are we waiting for?

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Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age, by Sallie McFague. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, 224pp.

Einstein is reported to have said that our entry into the nuclear age had changed everything except our way of thinking. As for thinking in theology Sallie McFague believes that it has failed to move with the pressing global issues of a nuclear age, with ecological awareness and post-modern sensibility in general. She sees traditional, patriarchal, imperialistic and triumphalist metaphors of God in a grim light. For her this language is not only idolatrous but also irrelevant; we need new images and metaphors that can speak to the age in which we live. Just as theology never faced up realistically to the claims of the Enlightenment, so today theology is not facing up to the claims of a post-modern world.

Two things are to be said here and she says them with great passion and clarity. First, there is nothing new in the need to restate the faith in terms that are relevant to a particular age. This is a perennial requirement of a lively faith. We cannot hope to interpret Christian faith for our own time if we remain indifferent to the basic images of the day that influence people's perceptions and behaviour. It is not just a matter of developing concepts relevant to the time we live in: the basic models and metaphors have to change. Here there has been a fair amount of deconstruction, but little construction.

The second point is that there is nothing to fear and much to gain from attempting such

construction. McFague is not proposing that the only criterion for theology is whether it fits the currently-reigning understanding of reality. But for theology to do less than to make sense within our present understanding — for theology to accept basic assumptions about reality from a very different time — is blatantly wrong-headed.

She recognizes two movements in theology that have taken the contemporary situation seriously: liberation theology, oriented to the needs of the poor and oppressed, and process theology, which challenges the mechanistic views that dominate science, technology and development with a holistic view of God and the world. But whilst applauding the relevance of these theologies McFague finds them lacking in one major way. Neither, she claims, has experimented with new models and metaphors appropriate for our time. They have moved boldly with new concepts but not with new images. And in the case of liberation theology it has limited its programme to the freeing of oppressed humanity, leaving the rest of the cosmos unaddressed. Yet for biblical and early Christianity salvation is basically a cosmic event: the *world* is saved.

What new models has Sallie McFague to propose? Here she is very explicit and it is this which makes her book the most exciting work in theology that I have read for years. Furthermore, her imaginative leaps and her forceful arguments are written with great lucidity, humility and charm. In searching for an image of the relation of God to the world she "experiments" with the model of the world as God's body. And that leads her to models of God as mother, lover and friend of the world. Before developing these models she devotes a couple of chapters, first to identifying the new sensibility of a post-modern world, and second to establishing the point that theology has to communicate in metaphors and needs new ones. And if this seems to some like fiddling while Rome burns, then heed her arguments that new imaginative pictures of the relationship between God and the world must precede action. And that action may well be revolutionary. This is the relevance of her book for ecumenical social ethics: without a sound and relevant theology social ethics rests on a foundation of sand.

Upholders of Article 1 of the 39 Articles of Religion of the Church of England will no doubt be shocked at the proposal that the world is God's body. Her argument is that God is to the world as the self is to its body. So the point is not to identify God with the world but to recognize a living involvement of God in the world. The God who is internally related to all that is, is a God who suffers and has joy with the creation as it suffers and enjoys its life. The God who is incarnate in the world is a God at risk. We have been given responsibility to care for God's body, our world. As the body of the world, God is forever "nailed to the cross", for as this body suffers, so God suffers. The concept of the world as God's body is not new but the image is. Another contemporary woman theologian, Grace Jantzen, in her book *God's World, God's Body* (Westminster, 1984) argues from a sympathetic understanding of theological tradition that to attribute a body to God is compatible with the affirmations of Christian faith, enriching them and giving them a stronger claim to be believed in our time. So while this may be the number one heresy in the 39 Articles, it is in essence part of orthodox Christian faith.

When we say that God is "father" we are imaging God on analogy with male human beings. Traditional language about God is not non-sexual — it is male. To image God on analogy with human beings, both male and female, means then that God is "she" and "he" and "neither". To balance the image of God as father, McFague argues for God as mother. That is not to say that only one aspect of the female is appropriate, but the parental model has three basic features that are important for our time: it brings us close to the beginnings of life, to the nurture of life, and to the impartial fulfilment of life. God as parent wants all, that is all life, to flourish. The relevance of this model to fulfilment in an age under nuclear and ecological threats is obvious.

"God is love" means that God is lover, else God is not love. This implies that God is in love. Being in love does not mean sex, lust or desire (though these are found within human relationships); the crux of love has to do with value. It is finding someone else valuable and being found valuable. God has passion for the world. Can we also have passion for God and the world? Passion means the deepest of feelings, including suffering. We speak of God as love but are afraid to call God lover. But a God who relates to all that is, not distantly and bloodlessly but intimately and passionately, is appropriately called "lover". God as lover is the moving power in the universe. God's love

is "erotic" since *eros* is the desire for union with that which is valuable, rather than rescuing that which is sinful and worthless.

For God the world is valuable. The Christian tradition has always claimed the original valuableness of the world. It has been far less certain about the present value of the world. But is it not far greater to be loved as God's beloved than as a rebellious sinner? That kind of love is a crucial aspect in the change of consciousness needed for an ecological nuclear era. Furthermore, for McFague God not only loves the world because it is valuable. God needs the world as lovers need each other, else God's love is not love at all. God is not the unmoved mover but mother-creator and lover. God needs the world as the world needs God. God as lover is interested not in rescuing certain individuals from the world but in saving, making whole, the entire cosmos that has become estranged and fragmented, sickened by unhealthy practices and threatened by death and extinction. In the context of this model of God, sin is the turning away not from a transcendent power but from interdependence with other beings, including the source of all being.

God as friend points to the motif in friendship of engagement in a work that is sustained by common vision. In the ecological nuclear age this is the vision of salvation of the whole earth. God and the creation are mutually involved in the future; it is not in God's hands alone nor in the hands of creation alone. In some respects this model of God so overlaps with God as lover that one might wonder why it is proposed. Perhaps this is why this model is elaborated in great detail, in ways which we cannot consider in this review.

There are immense implications in all these models for the theological understanding of sin and evil in the world. They are considered with insight and care. This is not a shallow optimistic view of modern liberal thought; yet it is hopeful rather than despairing, and full of the need for participation rather than leaving everything to God. Above all there is a sense of the tentativeness of any theological model: for "no one has seen God at any time", and we seek after God that we might find God. These models are there to help us on the way. In particular it could be of the utmost importance to those in the WCC who are groping for some understanding of "the integrity of creation". If that programme is to be effective it must surely be based on the kinds of theological insights in this book.

I put this book down with a sense of real adventure and discovery. It opens up the house of theology and does a pretty clean sweep of the Victorian furnishings to make room for something ineffably more beautiful and useful. I have only two complaints, and those to the publishers: how can they produce such a fine book yet give us no index? And why, when so many works are quoted, is there no bibliography? To be sure, if you work hard you can find the sources in the mixture of footnotes and references called "notes". As a scientist I think publishers of theological works might take a leaf from scientific writing. Long ago we got rid of footnotes and learned that an alphabetical bibliography is a most valuable part of a book.

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Theology and Religious Pluralism, by Gavin D'Costa. New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986, 155pp., £6.95.

One post-war development is that Christianity has become a minority religion in most parts of the world. There have been diverse responses to this new situation. *Theology and Religious Pluralism* by Gavin D'Costa is an effort to outline the major paradigms of Christian responses to other religions. The three paradigms identified are (1) the pluralist paradigm, (2) the exclusivist paradigm, and (3) the inclusivist paradigm. These paradigms emerge, it is contended, as a result of differing responses to two central affirmations of the Christian faith: that salvation comes through God in Christ alone, and that God's salvific will is universal. The book is an effort to evaluate the adequacy of the three paradigms.

The three paradigms are evaluated by considering outstanding representatives of them, namely John Hick, Hendrik Kraemer and Karl Rahner, respectively.

Chapter one of the book, the introduction, presents the background of the present discussion and identifies the issues involved. Chapters two, three and four are devoted to a consideration and evaluation of Hick, Kraemer and Rahner. In the fifth and final chapter the author attempts to "give shape to the implications of a viable Christian theology of

religions, found, with certain qualifications, in the works of Karl Rahner" (p.112).

D'Costa's summary of Hick's thought pertinent to the theme of the book is adequate. The pluralist paradigm of Hick, with its Copernican model, is rejected on several theological and phenomenological considerations. One of the important factors here is that Hick's placing of God at the centre of religions lacks adequate truth criteria. The author rightly points out that Hick has an implied Christocentricism in his theocentricism. However, he does not pay adequate attention to Hick's inability to incorporate atheistic, agnostic or humanistic ideologies. For example, does Hick consider Marxism devoid of truth? In a world which includes China, Russia and countries allied to them, where would Hick place their philosophy or ideology in his Copernican model of "religions"? If they are rejected, on what criteria of truth is this done? It is very important to ask Hick and all the pluralists how they have arrived at their criteria of truth, if they have any. Hick may have an implied Christocentricism; some others may hold an implied *Advaitin*, a Marxist-Leninist, or other stances. D'Costa does not show strongly enough the impossibility of operating in "mid-air", from a "neutral" position. A fuller critique of Hick should also have taken into account the rising religious fundamentalism in the world. How will the effort to "accommodate" all religions respond to militant forms of religious or ideological fundamentalism which will not tolerate Hick himself? There is indeed no religious or human existence possible without the need to say "no" to *some* religions and ideologies. D'Costa is right in his critique of Hick and of pluralism, but this critique is not comprehensive.

D'Costa's presentation of Kraemer and the exclusivist paradigm is lucid, orderly and sufficiently comprehensive. The author is certainly right in saying that, at the phenomenological level, Kraemer acknowledges the positive things in other religions and the importance of indigenization. However, Kraemer's theology is not broad enough to sustain this openness. Kraemer's contribution in seeing the "totalitarian" or systematic nature of religion is also acknowledged by D'Costa. However, D'Costa does not share the sharp distinction that Kraemer makes between Christ and Christianity. Not many will disagree with the author's contention that a genuine dialogue is difficult on the premises of Kraemer and of the exclusivist paradigm.

D'Costa treats Rahner and the inclusivist paradigm in greater detail than the other two. He goes to great pains to defend Rahner against both pluralists and exclusivists. Rahner's thoughts are presented in such a way that even those who are not familiar with his writings can follow the evaluation of them. More particularly, the concept of the "anonymous Christian" and its implications are explained.

For the most part D'Costa is in agreement with Rahner's version of inclusivism, and there are few points of disagreement between them. The author simply attempts to work out the implications of Rahner's theological propositions for the "history of religions". In his near-complete agreement with Rahner, a few points seem to escape D'Costa's attention. One cannot disagree with either of them in their effort to highlight the continuity between people of all religions which arises from the Christian doctrine of creation and the grace operative among all people at all times. But this same word of grace brings a word of judgment on all, in the incarnation. This is addressed to all, Christians and non-Christians, and is part of the redemptive grace. Our point of contact with the non-Christian world includes this judging grace revealed in incarnation. At this point one has to ask: has the judging and redeeming grace revealed in Christ in incarnation introduced a new factor into the history of the world? D'Costa would seem to imply that the same grace was always available as part of the grace of God, as part of the universal salvific will of God. Rahner's distinction between final cause and efficient cause, through which he tries to account for the work of God in Christ, is not entirely satisfactory. About this D'Costa says: "By this he (Rahner) means that God's universal love is not brought about (efficient cause) by Jesus' death, but that Jesus' death is the final and irreversible expression of what God has always been doing in history (final cause), which has, up until the incarnation, been obscured by the 'ambivalence of human and divine freedom'." One needs to ask at this point: has this "final and irreversible expression" made any difference to history? If "Yes", is not the confessing church the only group that consciously testifies to this? Answers to these questions are critical in the dialogue with other religions. I believe that it is possible to answer "Yes" to these questions without having to adopt the exclusivist position. Rahner and D'Costa do not fully ap-

preciate the impact of the word becoming flesh and the "word of stumbling" which this involves.

D'Costa's work is commendable because a highly theological debate is made extremely readable. Every student of theology will find this a profitable work. Most of D'Costa's own thinking is revealed in and through his discussion of Rahner. One only wishes that D'Costa's own position had been more explicitly stated.

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The Pipe and Christ: a Christian-Sioux Dialogue, by William Stolzman, Chamberlain, SD: Tipi Press, 1986, 227pp.

In his preface, the author recounts his vocation as a Jesuit and the spiritual odyssey which led him to make four vision quests according to the Lakota tradition. (The Lakota or Sioux culture, which flourished in the central part of the Missouri basin, can be taken as a fair representative of the general native American culture of the northern Great Plains.) Wishing to couch his experiences in an appropriate theology, Stolzman persuaded some other Roman Catholic priests and some Lakota spiritual leaders to form a dialogical group called The Rosebud Medicine Men and Pastors' Meeting. This club met under Stolzman's chairmanship for six years (1973-79) and the volume at hand is the product of its reflections. Membership fluctuated over the years but some forty individuals were eventually engaged in the work. Most of the Medicine Men were Roman Catholics and the priests had all participated in several Lakota ceremonies, so the Meeting sought to describe "a spiritual synthesis that already existed within religious men" (p.7). Lest anyone suspect a tendency to outright syncretism, we must note the caveat of the Meeting's vice-chair (Moses Big Crow): "We are not here to put the missionaries down or change anyone's way of doing things. We are here to understand one another" (p.17f.).

The first chapter is a straightforward study of the ceremony for making-a-relative and the rite of baptism, while the second is a more probing inquiry about Lakota and Christian religious identity. For Stolzman, the kingdom of God is like a four-part choir singing together; there is no single answer to the key questions of life and every voice has its own tone to meld into the harmony of worship. To such musical musings the author links his own version of the familiar notion of "natural" Christians (those people who love their neighbours), with no apparent sensitivity for those good folk who might find such a label discomfiting. He offers an amusing but misleading ecclesiology which assumes that each Protestant denomination has its particular interpretation of scripture (p.41), while explaining the Reformation in grossly simplistic terms.

The next two chapters concern sweatbaths, penance, purification and intercession. The "contrary qualities" of the sweatbath and the penitential order, we are told, "are not contradictory" (p.57) but this affirmation is sustained by an argument which could accommodate virtually any conceivable distinction. "As Vatican II and Chief Sitting Bull have said: We are to draw that which is good from whatever source presents it and reject the bad wherever it appears even among our own" (p.69). Chapter 5 continues with an interesting comparison of priestly vocations and a few thoughts on retreats and vision quests. A series of chapters on ghosts, spirits and theology follows, with helpful explanations of Lakota thinking on reincarnation and spirit types (animal, rock, clown, grey-haired). The author wisely reminds us to "prove the spirits" to discern whether they are of God: 1 John 4:1 (p.124).

Yuwipi is a Lakota spirit ceremony followed by a ritual feast. Lesser rites are called lowanpi (singing service) and wupila (thanksgiving). In chapter 9 Stolzman compares the order of ritual elements, prayers, music and the use of various colours in yuwipi and the mass. But he is reluctant to offer much comment on yuwipi, unwilling as he is to reopen old sores, and unable to give more than a cautious recognition of good intention, mitigated by a lingering concern over hexes and authenticity. He is more at ease in linking the sundance to the paschal mysteries as a celebration of creation, for Christians who have joined in the sundance affirm that the experience has strengthened their faith. It may well be that the "stories of the coming of the Pipe and Christ are not myths but legends" (p.166), but the author's extended comparison seems rather far-fetched, especially when the popes of Rome are aligned with the keepers of

the Pipe. Stolzman's discussion of anthropomorphism and the several Lakota and Christian names for God is very sensitive, but he reverts to hyperbole in matching the sign of the cross to the pipe ceremony.

The last chapter asks how the Lakota and Christian religions are related (p.206), and proposes four possible responses. Stolzman quickly reviews the first three (no difference, focus on differences, focus on similarities) before elaborating his (and the Meeting's) plea for a balanced appreciation. But he mars his presentation with an egregiously facile contrast between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The Meeting found both the Christian and Lakota religions to be "fit" (p.209), basically because they both respect the unity of God. Nevertheless, value judgments of this sort are seldom valid and the whole argument of compatibility sounds quite strained to veterans of other types of interfaith encounter. The book closes with an affirmation of the appossibility, even the vocation, of being both fully Christian and fully Lakota. We may wonder in passing what our Jesuit author would say of women who feel called to priesthood; but we must accept his sincerity, even as we express our earnest disappointment with the banal issue of the mountain's travail and the heedless ignorance of Jewish and Protestant thought.

There is a helpful glossary of Lakota terms, but the text is riddled with disconcerting misprints (Jesus brought starvation to the world, p.122; we should crave idols, p.199, etc., etc.) and distorted by innumerable grammatic lapses. The best passages of this volume are its analyses and descriptions, and it is most regrettable that its theological speculations and psychological introspections do not attain the full measure of the experience which evoked them.

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